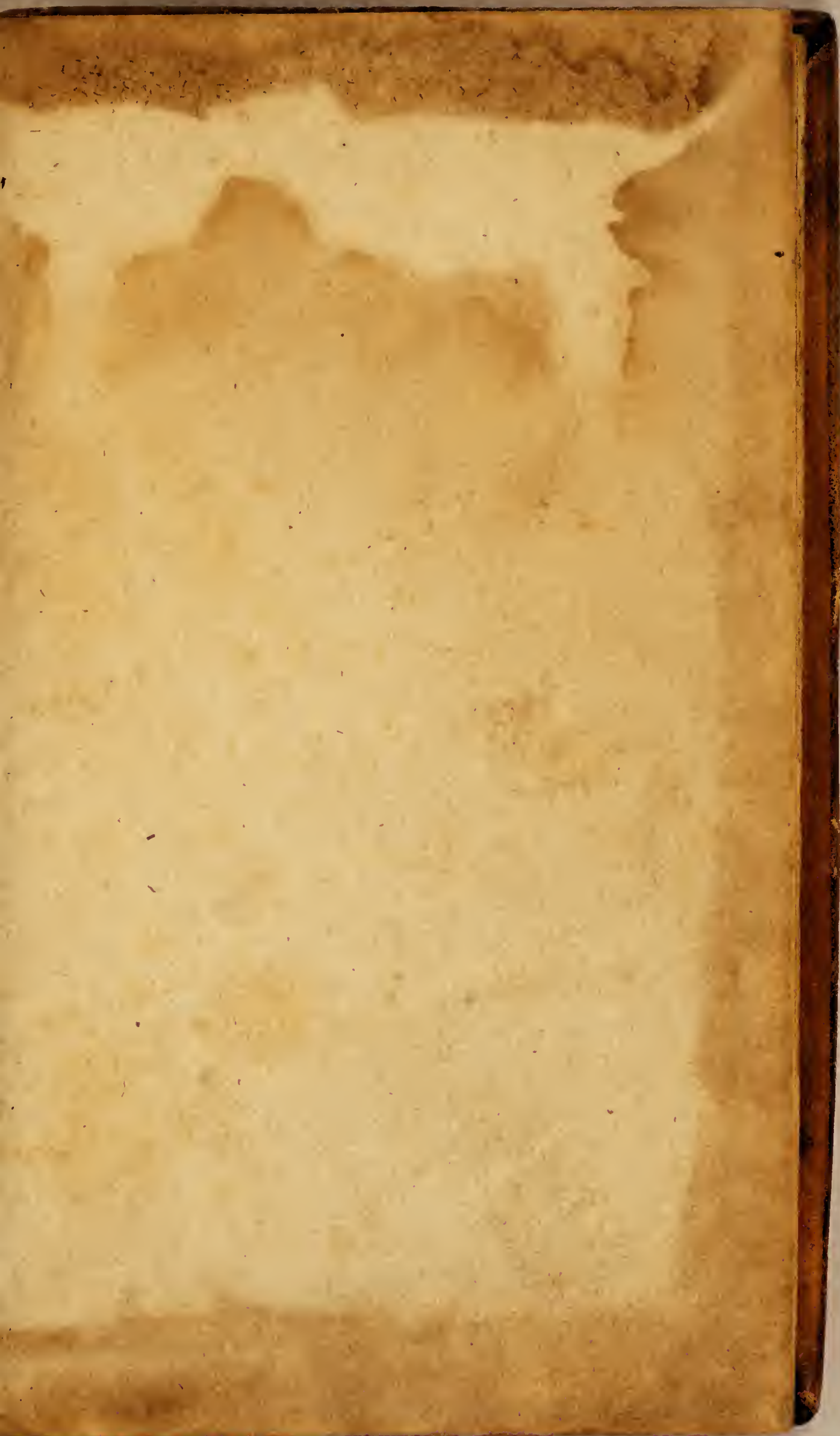


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A
GUIDE TO PRAYER:

OR, A

FREE AND RATIONAL

A C C O U N T

OF THE

GIFT, GRACE, AND SPIRIT

OF

P R A Y E R:

WITH

Plain Directions how every Christian may attain them.

BY J. WATTS, D. D.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY. Luke ix. 1.

ELIZABETH-TOWN:

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P R E F A C E ;

OR,

A short Account of the Design of this Treatise.

THE duty of prayer is so great and necessary a part of religion, that every degree of assistance toward the discharge of it, will be always acceptable to pious minds. The inward and spiritual performance of this worship is taught us in many excellent discourses ; but a regular scheme of prayer as a christian exercise, or a piece of holy skill, has been much neglected. The form, method, and expression, together with other attendants of it, such as voice and gesture, have been so little treated of, that few christians have any clear or distinct knowledge of them : And yet all these have too powerful an influence upon the soul in its most spiritual exercises ; and they properly fall under various directions of nature and scripture. Now while institutions of logic and rhetoric abound, that teach us to reason aright, and to speak well among men, why should the rules of speaking to God be so much untaught ?

It is a glory to our profession that there is a great number of ministers in our day and nation, who are happy in the gift of prayer, and exercise it continually, in an honorable and useful manner. Yet they

er christians among the dissenters might understand what they themselves mean, when they speak of praying by a Gift, and praying by the Spirit; that they might not expose themselves to the censure of talking without a meaning, nor be charged with enthusiasm by their conforming neighbors.

In discoursing of the gift, or ability to pray, I have been large and particular, both in directions to attain it, and describing the mistakes, and indecencies that persons may be in danger of committing in this duty; being well assured that we learn to avoid what is culpable, by a plain representation of faults and follies, much better than by a bare proposal of the best rules and directions.

But here I am prest between a double difficulty, and already feel the pain of displeasing some of my readers.

If I should describe these improprieties of speech and action in a moderate degree, scoffers would reproach a whole party of christians, and say, that I had copied all from the life; while my friends would be ready to suspect that I had published some of the errors of weaker brethren.

On the other hand, if I should represent these faults in their utmost degree of offensiveness, the adversary indeed could scarce have malice enough to believe any preacher in our day was guilty of them; but my friends

would tell me, I had played at impertinences, by exposing such faults as no body practises.

Now when two evils lie before me, I would choose the least. It is better to be impertinent than a publisher of folly; and therefore I have set forth those indecencies in their very worst appearance, that they might never be practised. Upon this account I have been forced to borrow instances of improper expressions from antiquated writers; and several of the descriptions of irregular voices and gesture, from some obscure persons of the last age, whose talent of assurance was almost the only qualification that made them speakers in public; and this I was constrained to do, because my observations of the prayers I have heard could never have supplied my design.

Besides, had I described some tolerable follies, perhaps weak men might have been ready to vindicate them because they did not see deformity enough to be blamed. But now the instances I have given appear so disagreeable and ridiculous, that all men must be convinced they ought to be avoided; and younger christians, when they learn to pray, will keep at the greatest distance from all such examples.

But it is a hard matter to attempt reformation, in any kind, without giving offence.

I have also added one short chapter of the Grace of Prayer, that the work might not appear too im-

perfect, though that has been abundantly and happily pursued in many treatises, and is the subject of daily sermons.

In speaking of the Spirit of Prayer, I have tried to obviate all controversies that have arisen to trouble the church, by giving what appeared to me the most natural exposition of the chief scriptures that refer to this matter; and superadding a reasonable and intelligible account of what hand the Spirit of God may be supposed to have in assisting his people in this part of worship.

At the end of these chapters I have laid down many rules, borrowed from reason, observation, and holy scripture, how every christian may, in some degree, attain these desirable blessings; and I have concluded the whole, with a hearty persuasive to covet the best gifts, and seek after the most excellent way of the performance of this duty.

Perhaps some persons may wonder, that in a treatise that professes to teach the skill of prayer, I should not once recommend the prayer that our Lord taught his disciples, as a perfect pattern for all christians. But it is my opinion that divine wisdom gave it for other purposes; and if this treatise meet with acceptance in the world, I may hereafter venture to expose my sentiments on the Lord's Prayer, if God should ever give me health to review and finish them, with a short essay or two on the Personal Ministry of Christ upon Earth, which are proper to be joined with them.

These institutions were at first composed for the use of a private society of younger men, who were desirous to learn to pray, and this may excuse the stile and way of address in some parts of the discourse. It has lain silent by me several years, and resisted many a call to appear in public, in hopes of being more polished before its first appearance. But when I shall have health and leisure to dress all my thoughts to the best advantage, that God only knows, whose hand has long confined me. I am convinced at last, that it is better for me to do something for God, though it be attended with imperfections, than be guilty of perpetual delays, in hopes of better pleasing myself.

After all the care I have taken to avoid controversy, and express myself in such a way as might not be justly offensive to any sober christians; yet if I should prove so unhappy, as to say any thing disagreeable to the sentiments of some of my younger readers, I must intreat them not to throw away the whole treatise, and deprive themselves of all the benefit they might obtain by other parts of it: Nor should they load the whole book with reproaches and censures, lest thereby they prevent others from reaping those advantages towards converse with God, which the more inoffensive pages might convey. An unwary censure or a rash and hasty word thrown upon a discourse, or a sermon, a preacher or a writer, has sometimes done more disservice to religion, than could ever be recompensed by many recantations. Permit, therefore, this little book, that has an honest design, to teach creatures to

hold correspondence with their God; permit it to do all the service that it can.

Had I found any treatise that had answered my designs I had never given myself the trouble of writing this at first, nor ventured to expose it now. There are indeed several well composed forms of devotion in the world, written by ministers of the conformist, and non-conformist persuasions; and these are of excellent use to instruct us in the matter and language of prayer, if we maintain our holy liberty, and do not tie our thoughts down to the words of men. Mr. HENRY'S Method of Prayer, is a judicious collection of scriptures, proper to the several parts of that duty. Mr. MURREY has composed a volume of addresses to God, which he calls Closet Devotions on the principal Heads of Divinity, in the Expressions of Scripture. Both these, if rightly used, will afford happy assistance to the humble and serious worshipper. Those Six Sermons on Prayer, published since this was written, are the useful labors of some of my valuable friends, and have many divine thoughts in them; but they take in the whole compass of this subject, in all the inward as well as outward parts of the worship; and therefore could not allow sufficient room to enlarge upon that which is my great design.

It is not necessary to inform the world, that Bishop WILKINS, in his discourse of the Gift of Prayer, has been my chief assistant toward the second chapter of this book; nor need I tell my reader what writings

I have consulted of the learned and pious Dr. OWEN, and others that have written for or against the work of the Spirit in Prayer, in order to gain a clearer light, nor what hints I have borrowed from the treatise of a very judicious author, with a fanciful title imposed upon it by an unknown hand, and called the Generation of Seekers, wherein several practical cases about the aids of the Spirit are largely and well handled; though I had the opportunity of knowing and consulting it only since this was in the press.

But if there are any advances made here beyond the labors of great men in the last age, I hope the world will excuse this attempt; and if younger christians, by perusal of these papers, should find themselves improved in the holy skill of prayer, when they get nearest to the throne of grace, I intreat them to put in one petition for the author, who has languished under great weakness for some years past, and is cut off from all public service. If ever he be restored again, he shall rejoice in further labors for their good—he shall share in the pleasure of their improvements, and assist them in the work of praise.



A
G U I D E
T O
P R A Y E R.

INTRODUCTION.

PRAYER is a word of an extensive sense in scripture, and includes not only a request or petition for mercies, but it is taken for the address of a creature on earth to God in heaven, about every thing that concerns his God, his neighbor, or himself, in this world, or the world to come. It is that converse, which God hath allowed us to maintain with himself above, while we are here below. It is that language, wherein a creature holds a correspondence with his Creator; and wherein the soul of a saint often gets near to God, is entertained with great delight, and, as it were, dwells with his heavenly Father for a short season before he comes to heaven. It is a glorious privilege that our Maker hath indulged to us, and a necessary part of that obedience which he hath required of us, at all times and seasons, and in every circumstance of life, according to those scriptures, 1 Thess. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.* Phil. iv. 6. *In*

every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Eph. vi. 18. Praying always, with all prayer and supplication.

Prayer is a part of divine worship that is required of all men, and is to be performed either with the voice, or only in the heart, and is called vocal or mental prayer. It is commanded to single persons in their private retirements, in a more solemn and continued method or manner; and in the midst of the businesses of life, by secret and sudden lifting up of the soul to God. It belongs also to the communities of men, whether they be natural, as families, or civil, as corporations, parliaments, courts, or societies for trade and business; and to religious communities, as when persons meet on any pious design, they should seek their God: It is required of the churches of Christians in an especial manner, for the house of God is the house of prayer. Since, therefore, it is a duty of such absolute necessity for all men, and of such universal use, it is fit we should all know how to perform it aright, that it may obtain acceptance of the great God, and become a delightful and profitable exercise to our own souls, and to those that join with us.

To this end I shall deliver my thoughts on this subject in the following order: ♥

I. I shall speak of the nature of prayer as a duty of worship.

II. As it is to be performed by the gifts or abilities God has bestowed upon us.

III. As it must be attended with the exercise of our graces.

IV. As we are assisted in it by the Spirit of God.
And,

V. Conclude all with an earnest address to Christians to seek after this holy skill of converse with God.

C H A P. I.

The NATURE of PRAYER.

IN the discourse of prayer considered as a duty of worship required of us, that we may understand the whole nature of it better, let it be divided into several parts; and I think they may be all included in these following, namely,

Invocation, adoration, confession, petition, pleading, profession of self-dedication, thanksgiving, and blessing; of each of which I shall speak particularly.

S E C T. I.

Of INVOCATION.

THE first part of prayer is INVOCATION, or calling upon God, and it may include in it three things:

1. 'A making mention of one or more of the names or titles of God;' and thus we do as it were bespeak the person to whom we pray: as you have abundant instances in the prayers that are delivered down to us in the holy scriptures: "Oh Lord my God, most high and most holy God and Father. O God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims. Almighty God and everlasting King. Our Father which art in heaven. O God, that keep-est covenant;" and several others.

2. 'A declaration of our desire and design to worship him:' "Unto thee do we lift up our souls. We draw near unto thee as our God. We come into thy presence. We that are but dust and ashes take upon us to speak to thy majesty. We bow ourselves before thee in humble addresses," or such like. And here it may not be amiss to mention briefly one or two general expressions of our own unworthiness.

3. 'A desire of his assistance and acceptance,' under a sense of our own insufficiency and unworthi-

ness, in such language as this is: "Lord, quicken us
"to call upon thy name. Assist us by thy Spirit in
"our access to thy mercy-seat. Raise our hearts to-
wards thyself. Teach us to approach thee as be-
comes creatures, and do thou draw near to us as a
God of grace. *Hearken to the voice of my cry, my
king and my God, for unto thee will I pray.*" In
the 17th Psalm, ver. 2. in which words you have all
these three parts of invocation expressed.

S E C T. II.

Of ADORATION.

THE second part of prayer is ADORATION or
honor paid to God by the creature; and it
contains these four things:

I. 'A mention of his nature, as God,' with the
highest admiration and reverence: And this includes
his most original properties and perfections, namely,
his self-sufficient existence, that he is God of and from
himself. His unity of essence, that there is no other God
besides himself. His inconceivable subsistence in three
persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
which mystery of the Trinity is a most proper object
of our adoration and wonder, since it so much surpas-
ses our understanding. His incomprehensible distance

from all creatures, and his infinite superiority of nature above them, seems also to claim a place here.—
The language of this part of prayer runs thus:—
“Thou art God, and there is none else; thy name
“alone is JEHOVAH the Most High. Who in the
“heavens can be compared to the Lord? or who a-
“mong the sons of the mighty can be likened to our
“God? All nations before thee are as nothing, and
“they are counted in thy sight less than nothing and
“vanity. Thou art the first and the last, the only
“true and living God; thy glorious name is exalted
“above all blessing and praise.”

2. ‘The mention of his several attributes with due expressions of praise, and with the exercise of suitable grace and affection; as his power, his justice, his wisdom, his sovereignty, his holiness, his goodness and mercy. Abundance of which sort of expressions you find in scripture, in those addresses that the saints have made to God in all ages: “Thou art very great,
“O Lord, thou art clothed with honor and majesty.
“Thou art the blessed and only potentate, King of
“kings, and Lord of lords. All things are naked and
“open before thine eyes. Thou searchest the heart of
“man, but how unsearchable is thy understanding!
“and thy power is unknown. Thou art of purer eyes
“than to behold iniquity. Thy mercy endureth for
“ever. Thou art slow to anger, abundant in good-
“ness, and thy truth reaches to all generations.”—
These meditations are of great use in the beginning of our prayers, to abase us before the throne of God,

to awaken our reverence, our dependence, our faith and hope, our humility and our joy.

3. ‘The mention of his several works of creation, of providence, and of grace, with proper praises.’—For as God is glorious in himself, in his nature and attributes, so by the works of his hands hath he manifested that glory to us, and it becomes us to ascribe the same glory to him, that is, to tell him humbly what a sense we have of the several perfections he hath revealed in these works of his; in such language as this: “Thou, Lord, hast made the heavens and
“the earth. The whole creation is the work of thine
“hands. Thou rulest among the armies of heaven,
“and among the inhabitants of the earth thou dost
“what pleases thee. Thou hast revealed thy good-
“ness towards mankind, and hast magnified thy mer-
“cy above all thy name. Thy works of nature and
“of grace are full of wonder, and sought out by all
“those that have pleasure in them.”

4. ‘The mention of his relation to us’ as a Creator, as a Father, as a Redeemer, as a King, as an almighty Friend, and our everlasting portion. And here it will not be improper to make mention of the name of Christ, in and through whom alone we are brought nigh to God, and made his children: By whose incarnation and atonement he becomes a God and Father to sinful men, and appears their reconciled friend. And by this means we draw still nearer to God, in every part of this work of adoration.

When we consider his nature, we stand afar off from him, as creatures from a God; for he is infinitely superior to us. When we speak of his attributes, there seems to grow a greater acquaintance between God and us; while we tell him that we have learnt something of his power, his wisdom, his justice, and his mercy. But when we proceed to make mention of the several works of his hands, wherein he has sensibly discovered himself to our understandings, we seem yet to approach nigher to God; and when at last we can arise to call him our God, from a sense of his special relation to us in Christ, then we gain the nearest access, and are better prepared for the following parts of his worship.

S E C T III.

Of CONFESSION.

THE third part of prayer consists in CONFESSION, which may also be divided into these four heads:

1. ‘An humble confession of the meanness of our nature in its original:’ Our distance from God, as we are creatures; our subjection to him, and our constant dependence on him: “Thou, O Lord, art in heaven, but we on the earth; our being is but of

“ yesterday, and our foundation is in the dust. What
“ is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of
“ man that thou shouldst visit him? Man that is a
“ worm, and the son of man that is but a worm. It
“ is in thee that we live, move, and have our being;
“ thou withholdest thy breath and we die.”

2. ‘ A confession of our sins;’ both original, which belong to our nature; and actual, that have been found in the course of our lives. We should confess our sins under the sense of the guilt of them, as well as under the deep and mournful impressions of the power of sin in our hearts. We should confess the sins that we have been guilty of in thought, as well as the iniquities of our lips and of our lives. Our sins of omission and sins of commission; the sins of our childhood and of our riper years; sins against the law of God, and sins more particularly committed against the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes it is convenient and necessary to enter into a more particular detail of our various faults and follies. We should mourn before God because of our pride and vanity of mind, the violence of our passions, our earthly-mindedness and love of this world, our sensuality and indulgence of our flesh, our carnal security and unthankfulness under plentiful mercies, and our fretfulness and impatience, or sinful dejection in a time of trouble: Our neglect of duty and want of love to God; our unbelief and hardness of heart; our slothfulness and decay in religion; the dishonor

we have brought to God, and all our miscarriages towards our fellow-creatures. And these may be aggravated on purpose to humble our souls yet more before God, by a reflection on their variety and their multitude. How often they have been repeated, even before and since we knew God savingly; that we have committed them against much light; and that we have sinned against much love; and that after many rebukes of the word and providence, and many consolations from the gospel and Spirit of God. You find this part of prayer very plentifully insisted and enlarged upon, among those examples that are left us in the word of God.

And with these confessions we must thus bewail and take shame to ourselves: “We are ashamed, and
“blush to lift up our faces before thee our God,
“for our iniquities are increased over our head, and
“our trespasses grown up to the heavens. Behold, we
“are vile, what shall we answer thee? We will lay
“our hands upon our mouth, and put our mouth in
“the dust, if so there may be hope.”

3. ‘A confession of our desert of punishment,’ and our unworthiness of mercy, arising from the sense that we have of all our aggravated sins, in such expressions as these: “We deserve, O Lord, to be for ever cast
“out of thy presence, and to be eternally cut off from
“all hope of mercy. We deserve to fall under the
“curse of that law which we have broken, and to be
“for ever banished from the blessings of that gospel

“ which we have so long refused. We have sinned a-
“ gainst so much mercy, that we are no longer wor-
“ thy to be called thy children. We are utterly un-
“ worthy of any of those favors that are promised in
“ thy word, and which thou hast given us encour-
“ agement to hope for. If thou contend with us for
“ our transgressions, we are not able to answer thee,
“ O Lord, nor to make excuse for one of a thousand;
“ if thou shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall
“ stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, there is
“ mercy and plenteous redemption.”

4. ‘ A confession or humble representation of our
‘ wants and sorrows of every kind;’ the particulars
of which will fall under the next head; but it is ne-
cessary they should be spread before God, and poured
out as it were in his presence; for God loves to hear
us tell him, what a sense our souls have of our own
particular necessities and troubles. He loves to hear
us complain before him, when we are under any pres-
sures from his hand, or when we stand in need of
mercies of any kind.

S E C T. IV.

Of P E T I T I O N.

THE fourth part of prayer consists in PETITION;
which includes in it a desire of deliverance
from evil, which is called *deprecation*, and a request

of good things to be bestowed, which is sometimes called *comprecation*. And on both these accounts we must offer up our petitions to God for ourselves and our fellow creatures.

The *evils* we pray to be delivered from, are of a temporal, spiritual, or eternal kind: “O Lord, take
“away the guilt of our sins by the atonement of thine
“own Son. Subdue the power of our iniquities by
“thine own Spirit. Deliver us from the natural
“darkness of our own minds, from the corruption of
“our hearts, and perverse tendencies of our appe-
“tites and passions. Free us from the temptations to
“which we are exposed, and the daily snares that
“attend us. We are in constant danger whilst we
“are in this life; let the watchful eye of our God be
“upon us for our defence. Deliver us from thine
“everlasting wrath, and from that eternal punishment
“that is due to our sins in hell. Save us from the
“power of our enemies in this world, and from all
“the painful evils that we have justly exposed our-
“selves to by sinning against thee.”

The *good* we desire to be conferred upon us is also of a temporal, spiritual, or eternal nature. As we pray for the pardon of all our iniquities for the sake of the great atonement, the death of our Redeemer, so we beg of God the justification of our persons thro’ the righteousness of his own Son Jesus Christ, and our acceptance with God unto eternal life. We pray for the sanctification of all the powers of our na-

tures by his Holy Spirit, for his enlightening influences, to teach us the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, as well as to discover to us the evil of sin, and our danger by it. We pray for the consolation of the Spirit of God, and that he would not only work faith, and love, and every grace in our hearts, but give us bright and plentiful evidences of his own work, and of our own interest in the love of God. We say unto God, “ O thou that hast the hearts of all men in
“ thine hand, form our hearts according to thine own
“ will, and according to the image of thine own Son:
“ Be thou our light and our strength, make us run in
“ the ways of holiness, and let all the means of grace
“ be continued to us, and be made serviceable for the
“ great end for which thou hast appointed them. Pre-
“ serve thy gospel amongst us, and let all thy provi-
“ dences be sanctified. Let thy mercies draw us near-
“ er to thyself, as with the cords of love; and let the
“ several strokes of thine afflicting hand wean us from
“ sin, mortify us to this world, and make us ready
“ for a departure hence, whensoever thou pleasest to
“ call us. Guide us by thy counsels, and secure us by
“ thy grace, in all our travels through this dangerous
“ wilderness; and at last give us a triumph over death,
“ and a rich and abundant entrance into the kingdom
“ of thy Son in glory. But since while we are here
“ we wear these bodies of flesh about us, and there
“ are many things necessary to support our lives, and
“ to make them easy and comfortable, we intreat thou
“ wouldst bestow these conveniencies and refresh-
“ ments upon us, so far as is consistent with thine

“own glory, and the designs of thy grace. Let our
“health, our strength, and our peace be maintained,
“and let holiness to the Lord be inscribed upon them
“all; that whatsoever we receive from thy hands, may
“be improved to thine honor, and our own truest
“advantage: Heal our diseases, and pardon our ini-
“quities, that our souls may ever bless thee.”

And as we are required to offer up petitions for ourselves, and make our own requests known to God, so we are commanded to make *supplication for all saints*, Ephes. vi. 18. and to offer up *prayers and intercession for all men*. 1 Tim. ii. 1. And the word intercession is the common name for this part of our petitions. In general, we must pray for the church of Christ, for Zion lies near to the heart of God, and her name is written upon the palms of the hands of our Redeemer; and the welfare of Zion should be much upon our hearts; we ought ever to have the tenderest concern for the whole church of God in the world: His church he values above kingdoms and nations, and therefore if we distinguish degrees of fervency in prayer, we ought to plead more earnestly with God for his church than for any nation or kingdom; that he would enlarge the borders of the kingdom of Christ; that he would spread his gospel among the heathens, and make the name of Christ known and glorious from the rising of the sun to its going down: That he would call in the remainder of his ancient people the Jews, and that he would bring the fulness of the Gentiles into his church; that he would pour

down a more abundant measure of his own Spirit, to carry on his own work upon the earth. And we are to send up longing and earnest wishes to heaven, that the Spirit may descend and be diffused in plentiful degrees upon churches, upon ministers, upon families, and upon all the saints. We are to pray that God would deliver his church from the power of persecuting enemies; that he would restrain the wrath of man, and suffer not the wicked to triumph over the righteous. We are also in particular to request of God mercy for the nation to which we belong; that liberty and peace may be established and flourish in it; for governors that rule over us, in places of supreme authority or subordinate; that wisdom and faithfulness may be conferred upon them from heaven, to manage those affairs God hath intrusted them with on earth. We must pray for our friends and those that are nearly related to us, that God would deliver them from all the evils they feel or fear, and bestow upon them all the good we wish for ourselves here or hereafter.

There is also another kind of petition which is used frequently in the Old Testament, and that is *imprecation*, or a calling for vengeance and destruction upon enemies; but this is very seldom to be used under the gospel, which is a dispensation of love, and should never be employed against our personal enemies, but only against the enemies of Christ, and such as are irreconcilable to him. Christ has taught us in his life, and given us an example at his death, to forgive and

pray for our personal enemies, for that is a noble singularity and glory of our religion.

Here let it be observed, that when we pray for those things which are absolutely necessary to the glory of God, or to our own salvation, we may use a more full and fervent importunity in prayer; we may say—
“ Lord, without the pardon of our sins we cannot rest
“ satisfied; without the renovation of our natures by
“ thy grace, our souls can never rest easy; without
“ the hopes of heaven we can never be at peace, and
“ in these respects will never let thee go till thou bless
“ us. For Zion’s sake we will not hold our peace,
“ and for the sake of thy Jerusalem, thy glory, thy
“ church in the world, we will give thee no rest till
“ thou hast made her the joy of the earth.”

But on the other hand, when we plead with God, for those mercies or comforts upon which our salvation or his own glory do not necessarily depend, we dare not use so absolute an importunity in prayer; but we must learn to limit our petitions in such language as this: “ If it be consistent with thine eter-
“ nal counsels, with the purposes of grace, and the
“ great ends of thy glory, then bestow upon us such
“ a blessing: If it may be for the true interest of our
“ souls, and for thine honor in the world, then let this
“ favor be granted to us; otherwise we would learn
“ to resign ourselves to thy wiser determination, and
“ say—Father, not our wills, but thine be done.”

S E C T. V.

Of PLEADING.

THE fifth part of prayer may be called PLEADING WITH GOD; which, though it be not so distinct a part by itself, but rather belongs to the work of petition and request, yet it is so very large and diffusive, that it may well be separated by itself, and treated of distinctly. Pleading with God, or arguing our case with him in a fervent, yet humble manner, is one part of that importunity in prayer, which scripture so much recommends. This is what all the saints of old have practised; what Job resolves to engage in, Job xxiii. 4. *If I could get nearer to God, I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.* This is what the prophet Jeremiah practised, Jer. xii. 1. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?* We are not to suppose that our arguments can have any real influence on God's own will, and persuade him contrary to what he was before inclined: But as he condescends to talk with us after the manner of men, so he admits us to talk with him in the same manner too, and encourages us to plead with him as though he were inwardly and really moved and prevailed upon by our importunities. So you find Moses is said to have prevailed upon God for the preservation of his

people Israel, when he seemed resolved upon their destruction, *Exod. xxxii. 7—14*. In this work of pleading with God, arguments are almost infinite, but the chief of them may be reduced to these following heads:

1. ‘ We may plead with God from the greatness
‘ of our wants, our dangers, or our sorrows;’ whether
they relate to the soul or the body, to this life or the
life to come, to ourselves or those for whom we pray.
We may draw arguments for deliverance from the
particular kind of afflictions that we labor under:—
“ My sorrows, O Lord, are such as overpress me, and
“ endanger my dishonoring thy name and thy gospel.
“ My pains and my weaknesses hinder me from thy
“ service, that I am rendered useless upon earth, and
“ a cumberer of the ground. They have been already
“ of so long continuance, that I fear my flesh will not
“ be able to hold out, nor my spirit to bear up, if
“ thine hand abide thus heavy upon me. If this sin be
“ not subdued in me, or that temptation removed, I
“ fear I shall be turned aside from the paths of reli-
“ gion, and let go my hope.” Thus from the kind,
degree, or duration of our difficulties, we may draw
arguments for relief.

2. ‘ The several perfections of the nature of God,’
are another head of arguments in prayer. “ For thy
“ mercy’s sake, O Lord, save me: Let thy loving-
“ kindness be displayed in my salvation. Thou art
“ wise, O Lord, and though mine enemies are crafty,
“ thou canst disappoint their devices; and thou know-

“ est how by thy wondrous counsels to turn my sor-
“ rows into joy. Thou canst find out a way for my
“ relief, when all creatures stand afar off and say, that
“ they see no way to help me. Thou art almighty and
“ all-sufficient; thy power can suppress my adver-
“ saries at once, vanquish the tempter, break the pow-
“ ers of darkness to pieces, release me from the chains
“ of my corruption, and bring me into glorious liber-
“ ty. Thou art just and righteous, and wilt thou let
“ the enemy oppress for ever? Thou art sovereign,
“ and all things are at thy command: Thou canst say
“ to pains and diseases, go, or come; speak therefore
“ the sovereign word of healing, and my flesh and soul
“ shall praise thee. Thou delightest in pardoning
“ grace: It is the honor of our God to forgive, there-
“ fore let my iniquities be all cancelled, through the
“ abundance of thy rich mercy.”

3. Another argument in pleading with God may
be drawn from ‘ the several relations in which God
‘ stands unto men, particularly to his own people.’—
“ Lord, thou art my creator, wilt thou not have a de-
“ sire to the work of thine hands? Hast thou not
“ made me and fashioned me, and wilt thou now de-
“ stroy me? Thou art my governor and my king, to
“ whom should I fly for protection but to thee, when
“ the enemies of thine honor and my soul beset me
“ around? Art thou not my Father? and hast thou
“ not called me one of thy children, and given me a
“ name and a place among thy sons and thy daugh-
“ ters? Why should I look like one cast out of thy

“ fight, or that belongs to the family of Satan? Are
“ not the bowels of a father with thee, and tender
“ compassions? Why should one of thy poor and weak
“ helpless children be neglected or forgotten? Art
“ thou not my God in covenant, and the God and
“ Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom that
“ covenant is ratified? Under that relation I would
“ plead with thee for all necessary mercies.”

4. ‘ The various and particular promises of the
“ covenant of grace,’ are another rank of arguments to
use in prayer. “ Enlighten me, O Lord, and pur-
“ don me, and sanctify my soul; and bestow grace
“ and glory upon me, according to that word of thy
“ promise on which thou hast caused me to hope.—
“ Remember thy word is passed in heaven, it is re-
“ corded among the articles of thy sweet covenant;
“ that I must receive light, and love, and strength, and
“ joy, and happiness; and art thou not a faithful God,
“ to fulfil every one of those promises? What if hea-
“ ven and earth must pass away? yet thy covenant
“ stands upon two immutable pillars, thy promise and
“ thine oath; and now I have fled for refuge to lay
“ hold on this hope, let me have strong consolation.
“ Remember the covenant made with thy Son in the
“ days of eternity, and let the mercies there promised
“ to all his seed be bestowed upon me according to
“ my various wants.” This calling to remembrance
the covenant of God, hath been often of great effi-
cacy and prevalence in the prayers of the ancient
saints.

5. 'The name and honor of God in the world,' is another powerful argument. "What wilt thou do for thy great name, if Israel should be cut off or perish? Joshua vii. 9. If thy saints go down to the grave in multitudes, who shall praise thee in the land of the living? The dead cannot celebrate thee, nor make mention of thy name and honor, as I do this day." This was the pleading of Hezekiah, Isa. xxxviii. 18. and David uses the same language, Psal. vi. 5. *For thy name sake*, was a mighty argument in all the ancient times of the church.

6. 'Former experiences of ourselves and others,' are another set of arguments to make use of in prayer. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in that prophetic psalm, Psal. xxii. 5. is represented as using this argument: "Our fathers cried unto thee, O Lord, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and they were not confounded; let me be a partaker of the same favor, whilst I cry unto thee, and make thee my trust: Thou hast never said to the seed of Jacob—Seek ye my face in vain; and let it not be said that thy poor servant has now sought thy face, and has not found thee. Often have I received mercy in a way of return to prayer: Often hath my soul drawn near unto thee, and been comforted in the midst of sorrows: Often have I taken out fresh supplies of grace according to my need; from the treasures of thy grace that are in Christ; and shall the door of these treasures be shut against me now? Shall I receive no more favors from the hand of my God,

“that has heretofore dealt them so plentifully to me?” Now how improper soever this sort of argument may seem to be, used in courts of princes, or to intreat the favor of great men, yet God loves to hear his own people make use of it: For though men are quickly weary of multiplying their bounties, yet the more we receive from God, if we humbly acknowledge it to him, the more we are like to receive still.

7. The most powerful and most prevailing argument is, ‘the name and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ And though there be some hints, or shadows of the use of it in the Old Testament, yet it was never taught us in a plain and express manner, till a little before our Saviour left this world, John xvi. 23, 24. *Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* This seems to be reserved for the peculiar pleasure and power of the duty of prayer under the gospel. We are taught to make mention of the name of Jesus, the only begotten and eternal Son of God, as a method to receive our biggest requests and fullest salvation: And in such language as this we should address the Father, “Lord, let my sins be forgiven, for the sake of that love which thou bearest
“thine own Son; for the sake of that love which thy
“Son beareth to thee; for the sake of his humble
“state, when he took flesh upon him, that he might
“look like a sinner, and be made a sacrifice though
“himself was free from sin; for the sake of his per-

“fect and painful obedience, which has given com-
“plete honor to thy law; for the sake of the curse
“which he bore, and the death which he suffered,
“which hath glorified thine authority, and honored thy
“justice more than it was possible for my sins to have
“affronted it: Remember his dying groans; remem-
“ber his agonies when the hour of darkness was upon
“him; and let not the powers of darkness prevail o-
“ver me: Remember the day when thou stoodest afar
“from thine own Son, and he cried out as one for-
“saken of God, and let me have thine everlasting
“presence with me; let me never be forsaken, since
“thy Son hath borne that punishment.” Again, we
may plead with God the intercession of Jesus our
high-priest above: “Father, we would willingly ask
“thee for nothing but what thy Son already asks thee
“for: We would willingly request nothing at thine
“hands, but what thine own Son requests beforehand
“for us: Look upon the Lamb, as he had been slain,
“in the midst of the throne: Look upon his pure
“and perfect righteousness, and that blood with which
“our high-priest is entered into the highest heavens,
“and in which for ever he appears before thee to make
“intercession; and let every blessing be bestowed up-
“on me, which that blood did purchase, and which
“that great, that infinite petitioner pleads for at thy
“right hand. What canst thou deny thine own Son?
“For he hath told us, that thou hearest him always.
“For the sake of that Son of thy love, deny us not.”

Thus I have finished this fifth part of prayer, which consists in pleading with God.

S E C T. VI.

Of PROFESSION, *or* SELF-DEDICATION.

THE sixth part of prayer consists in PROFESSION OR SELF-DEDICATION.

This is very seldom mentioned by writers as a part of prayer; but to me it appears so very necessary in its nature, and distinct from all the rest, that it ought to be treated of separately, as well as any other part; and may be divided under these four heads:

1. ‘A profession of our relation to God.’ And it is worth while sometimes for a saint to draw near unto God, and to tell him that he is the Lord’s: That he belongs to his family: That he is one of his household: That he stands among the number of his children: That his name is written in his covenant: And there is a great deal of spiritual delight and soul-satisfaction arises from such appeals to God concerning our relation to him.

2. ‘A profession of our former transactions with God.’ “Lord, we have given ourselves up unto thee, and chosen thee for our eternal portion, and

“ our highest good: We have seen the insufficiency
“ of creatures to make us happy, and we have betaken
“ ourselves to an higher hope; we have beheld
“ Christ Jesus the Saviour in his perfect righteousness,
“ and in his all-sufficient grace; we have put our trust
“ in him, and we have made our covenant with the
“ Father, by the sacrifice of his Son; we have often
“ drawn near to thee, in thine ordinances; we have
“ ratified and confirmed the holy covenant at thy table,
“ as well as been devoted to thee by the initial
“ ordinance of baptism; we have given up our names
“ to God in his house; and we have, as it were, subscribed
“ with our hands to be the Lord’s.

3. ‘ A present surrender of ourselves to God, and
‘ a profession of the present exercise of our several affections
‘ and graces towards him.’ And this is sweet language in prayer, when the soul is in a right frame:
“ Lord, I confirm all my former dedications of myself
“ to thee; and be all my covenantings forever ratified.
“ Or if I did never yet sincerely give myself up
“ to the Lord, I do it now with the greatest solemnity,
“ and from the bottom of my heart. I commit my
“ guilty soul into the hands of Jesus, my Redeemer,
“ that he may sprinkle it with his atoning blood, that
“ he may clothe it with his justifying righteousness,
“ and make me (a vile sinner) accepted in the
“ presence of a just and holy God. I appear, O Father,
“ in the presence of thy justice and holiness, clothed
“ in the garments of thine own Son, and I trust thou
“ beholdest not iniquity in me to punish it. I give

“ my soul, that has much corruption in it by nature,
 “ and much of the remaining power of sin, into the
 “ hands of my Almighty Saviour, that by his grace he
 “ may form all my powers anew; that he may sub-
 “ due every irregular appetite, and root out every dis-
 “ orderly passion; that he may frame me after his own
 “ image, fill me with his own grace, and fit me for
 “ his own glory. I hope in thee, my God, for thou
 “ art my refuge, my strength and my salvation. I
 “ love thee above all things; and I know I love thee.
 “ Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is
 “ none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee:
 “ I desire thee with my strongest affections, and I de-
 “ light in thee above all delights: My soul stands in
 “ awe, and fears before thee; and I rejoice to love
 “ such a God, who is Almighty, and the object of
 “ my highest reverence.”

4. ‘A profession of our humble and holy resolu-
 tions to be the Lord’s forever.’ This is what is gen-
 erally called a vow. Now though I cannot encour-
 age Christians to bind themselves in particular in-
 stances, by frequently repeated vows, and especially in
 things that are in themselves indifferent; which often-
 times proves a dangerous snare to souls; yet we can
 never be too frequent, or too solemn in the general
 surrender of our souls to God, and binding our souls
 by a vow to be the Lord’s forever: To love him a-
 bove all things; to fear him, to hope in him, to walk
 in his ways, in a course of holy obedience, and to wait
 for his mercy unto eternal life. For such a vow as

this is, is included in the nature of both the ordinances of the gospel, baptism and the Lord's supper. Such a vow as this is, is comprehended almost in every act of worship, and especially in solemn addresses to God by prayer. I might add, in the last place, that 'together with this profession or self-dedication to God, it is necessary we should renounce every thing that is inconsistent herewith, and that under each of the four preceding heads : ' As, "I am thine, O Lord, and belong not to this world : I have given myself to thee, and I have given myself away from sin and from the creature : I have renounced the world as my portion, and chosen thee, Father. I have renounced all other Saviours, and all my own duties and righteousnesses as the foundation of my interest in the favor of God, and chosen Christ Jesus as my only way to the Father. I have renounced my own strength as the ground of my hope ; for my understanding is dark, my will is impotent, and my best affections are insufficient to carry me onwards to Heaven : I now again renounce dependence upon all of them, that I may receive greater light, and strength, and love from God. I am dead to the law, I am mortified to sin, I am crucified to the world, and all by the cross of Jesus, my Saviour. I bid Satan get him behind me ; I renounce him and his works ; I will neither fear him nor love him ; nor lay a confederacy with the men of this world ; for I love my God, for I fear my God, in my God is my eternal help and hope : I will say, What have I to do any more with idols ? and I

“banish the objects of temptation from my sight.
 “Thus I abandon every thing that would divide me
 “from God, to whom I have made a surrender of
 “myself. And shouldst thou see fit to scourge and
 “correct me, O my God, I submit to thine hand;
 “shouldst thou deny me the particular requests I have
 “presented to thee, I leave myself in thy hands, trust-
 “ing thou wilt choose better for me. And because
 “I know my own frailty of heart, and the inconsan-
 “cy of my will, I humbly put all these my vows and
 “solemn engagement into the hands of my Lord Je-
 “sus to fulfil them in me, and by me, through all the
 “days of my infirmity, and this dangerous state of
 “trial.”

S E C T. VII.

Of THANKSGIVING.

THE seventh part of prayer consists in THANKS-
 GIVING. To give thanks is to acknowledge the
 bounty of that hand whence we receive our blessings,
 and to ascribe honor and praise, to the power, the wis-
 dom, and the goodness of God upon that account.
 And this is part of that tribute which God, our King,
 expects at our hands, for all the favors we receive
 from him. It very ill becomes a creature to partake
 of benefits from his God, and then to forget his head

venly benefactor, and grow regardless of that bounty whence his comforts flow. The matter of our thanksgivings may be ranged under these two heads: We must give thanks for those benefits for which we have prayed, and for those which God hath conferred upon us without praying for.

I. ' Those benefits which God hath bestowed on
' us without asking,' are proper to be mentioned in
in the first place, for they are the effects of his rich
and preventing mercy: And how many are the blessings of his goodness with which he hath prevented us!
" We praise thee, O Lord, for thine original designs
" of love to fallen man; that thou shouldst make a distinction between us and the angels that sinned:
" What is man that thou art thoughtful about his
" salvation; and sufferest the angels to perish forever,
" without remedy: That thou should choose a certain number of the race of Adam, and give them
" into the hands of Christ, before all worlds, and make
" a covenant of grace with them, in Christ Jesus,
" that their happiness might be secured: That they
" should reveal this mercy in various types and promises to our fathers, by the prophets; and that in
" thine own appointed time, thou shouldst send thy
" Son to take our nature upon him, and to redeem us
" by his death? We give glory to thy justice and to
" thy grace for this work of terror and compassion—
" this work of reconciling sinners to thyself, by the
" punishment of thy Son: We praise thee for the gospel which thou hast published to the world—the

“gospel of pardon and peace ; and that thou hast con-
“firmed it by such abundant testimonies, to raise and
“establiſh our faith: We give glory to that power
“of thine that has guarded thy gospel in all ages,
“and through ten thousand oppositions of Satan, has
“delivered it down safe to our age, and has proclaim-
“ed the glad tidings of peace in our nation : We bless
“thee that thou hast built habitations for thyself a-
“mongst us, and that we should be born in such a
“land of light as this is : It is a distinguishing favor of
“thine, that among the works of thy creation we
“should be placed in the rank of rational beings ; but
“it is more distinguishing goodness, that we should
“be born of religious parents, under the general pro-
“mises of grace. We give thanks unto thy good-
“ness for our preservation from many dangers which
“we could never foresee, and which we could not ask
“thee to prevent : How infinitely are we indebted to
“thee, O Lord, that thou hast not cut us off in a state
“of nature and sin, and that our portion is not at this
“time amongst the children of eternal wrath ! That
“our education should be under religious care, and
“and that we should have so many conveniences and
“comforts of life conferred upon us ; as well as the
“means of grace brought near to us ; and all this be-
“fore we began to know thee, or sought any of the
“mercies of this life, or the other at thine hands !”

2. ‘We must give thanks for the benefits we have
‘received as an answer to prayer.’ Whatsoever bless-
ings we have sought at the hands of God, demand

our acknowledgements to his goodness, when we become receivers: And here there is no need to enlarge in particulars, for we may look back upon the fourth part of prayer, which consists in petition, and there read the matter of our thankfulness. There we learn to give glory to God for our deliverance from evils, temporal and spiritual, and our hopes of deliverance from the evils that are eternal; for the communication of good for soul and body, and our comfortable expectation of the eternal happiness of both; for mercies bestowed on churches, on nations, on our governors, on relatives, and our friends, as well as ourselves. And we should rejoice in our praises, and say to the Lord, “ Verily thou art a God that hearest prayer, and
“ thou hast not despised the cry of those that sought
“ thee; we ourselves are witnesses, that thou dost not
“ bid thy people seek thy face in vain.”

All these our thanksgivings may be yet farther heightened in prayer, by the consideration of the multitude of the mercies that we have received, of their greatness, and of their continuance: By the mention of the glory and self-sufficiency of God, the giver; that he is happy in himself, and stands in no need of us, and yet he condescends to confer perpetual benefits upon us; that he is sovereign, and might dispose of his favors to thousands, and leave us out of the number of his favorites. That we are as vile and unworthy as others, and that our God beholds all our unworthiness, all our guilt, our repeated provocations, and his past mercies abused, and yet he continues to have mercy upon us, and waits to be gracious.

S E C T. VIII.

Of B L E S S I N G.

THE eighth part of prayer consists in BLESSING OF GOD, which has a distinct sense from praise or adoration, and is distinguished also from thanksgiving. In Psalms cxlv. 10. it is said, *All thy works praise thee, and thy saints bless thee*; that is, even the inanimate creation, which are the works of God, manifest his attributes and his praises, but his saints do something more, they bless his name; which part of worship consists in these two things:

1. 'In mentioning the several attributes and glories of God with inward joy, satisfaction, and pleasure.' "We delight, O Lord, to see thy name honored in the world, and we rejoice in thy real excellencies: We take pleasure to see thee exalted above all: We triumph in the several perfections of thy nature, and we give thanks at the remembrance of thine holiness." Thus we rejoice and bless the Lord for what he is in himself, as well as for what he has done for us: And this a most divine and noble act of worship.

2. 'Wishing the glories of God may forever continue, and rejoicing at the assurance of it.' "May the name of God be for ever blessed: May the king-

dom, and the power, and the glory be forever ascribed to him: May all generations call him honorable, and make his name glorious in the earth. To thee, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, belong everlasting power and honor."

S E C T. IX.

AMEN, *or the* CONCLUSION.

WE are taught in several places of scripture to conclude our prayers with AMEN; which is a Hebrew word that signifies truth, or faithfulness, certainly, surely, &c. and it implies in it these four things:

1. 'A belief of all that we have said concerning God 'and ourselves,' of all our ascriptions of honor to God in the mention of his name, and attributes, and works, and a sensible inward persuasion of our own unworthiness, our wants and our sorrows, which we have before expressed.

2. 'A wishing and desiring to obtain all that we 'have prayed for,' longing after it, and looking for it, "Lord, let it be thus as we have said," is the language of this little word *Amen*, in the end of our prayers.

3. 'A confirmation of all our professions, promises, and engagements to God:' It is used as the form of the oath of God in some places in scripture, *Verily or Surely in blessing I will bless thee*, Heb. vi. 13, 14. And it is as it were, a solemn oath in our lips, binding ourselves to the Lord, according to the professions that we have made in the foregoing part of worship.

4. It implies also 'the hope and sure expectation of the acceptance of our persons, and audience of our prayers.' For while we thus confirm our dedication of ourselves to God, we also humbly lay claim to his accomplishment of the promises of his covenant, and expect and wait that he will fulfil all our petitions, so far as they are agreeable to our truest interest, and the designs of his own glory.

C H A P. II.

Of the GIFT of PRAYER.

HAVING already spoken of the nature of prayer, and distinguished it into its several parts, I proceed to give some account of the gift or ability to pray.

This holy skill of speaking to God in prayer, hath been usually called a gift, and upon this account it

hath been represented by the weakness and folly of some persons, like the gift of miracles or prophecy, which are entirely the effects of divine inspiration, wholly out of reach, and unattainable by our utmost endeavors. The malice of others hath hereupon taken occasion to reproach all pretences to it as vain fancies, and wild enthusiasm. But I shall attempt to give so rational an account of it in the following sections, and lay down such plain directions how to attain it, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and his blessing on our own diligence and labor, that I hope those prejudices will be taken off, and the unjust reproach be wiped away for ever.

S E C T. I.

What the GIFT of PRAYER is.

THE gift of prayer may be thus described: 'It is an ability to suit our thoughts to all the various parts and designs of this duty, and a readiness to express those thoughts before God in the fittest manner to profit our own souls, and the souls of others that join with us.'

It is called a gift, partly because it was bestowed on the apostles and primitive christians, in an immediate and extraordinary manner, by the Spirit of God;

and partly because there is an ordinary assistance of the Spirit of God required, even to the attainment of this holy skill or ability to pray.

In the first propagation of the gospel, it pleased the Spirit of God to bestow various powers and abilities on believers, and these were called the *Gifts of the Spirit*, 1 Cor. xii. 4, 8, 9. Such were the gifts of preaching, of exhortation, of psalmody, *i. e.* of making and singing of psalms, of healing the sick, of speaking several tongues, &c. Now, though these were given to men at once in an extraordinary way then, and the habits wrought in them by immediate divine power, made them capable of exerting the several acts proper thereto, on just occasions; yet these powers or abilities of speaking several tongues, of psalmody, of preaching and healing, are now to be obtained by human diligence, with due dependence on the concurring blessing of God. And the same must be said concerning the gift, or faculty of prayer.

As the art of medicine or healing is founded on the knowledge of natural principles, and made up of several rules drawn from the nature of things, from reason and observation; so the art of preaching is learned and attained by the knowledge of divine principles, and the use of rules and directions for explaining and applying divine truths; and so the holy skill of prayer is built on a just knowledge of God and ourselves, and may be taught in as rational a method by proper directions and rules. But because in a spe-

cial manner we expect the aids of the Holy Spirit in things so serious and sacred, therefore the faculties of preaching and praying are called the gifts of the Spirit even to this day; whereas that word is not now-a-days applied to the art of medicine, or skill in the languages.

S E C T. II.

Of FORMS of PRAYER, of FREE or CONCEIVED PRAYER, and PRAYING EXTEMPORE.

THE gift of prayer is one of the noblest and most useful in the Christian life, and therefore to be sought with earnest desire and diligence; and in order to attain it, we must avoid these two *extremes*:

I. A confining ourselves entirely to pre-composed forms of prayer.

II. An entire dependence on sudden motions, and suggestions of thought.

I. *The first extreme* to be avoided is, 'a confining ourselves to set pre-composed forms of prayer.'

I grant it lawful and convenient for weaker Christians to use a form in prayer, rather than not perform

that duty at all. Christ himself seems to have indulged it to his disciples in their infant state of Christianity, Luke xi. 1, 2, &c. I grant also that sometimes the most improved saints may find their own wants and desires, and the frames of their own hearts, so happily expressed in the words of other men, that they cannot find better; and may therefore, in a very pious manner, use the same especially when they labor under a present deadness of spirit and great indisposition for the duty. It is also evident, that many assistances may be borrowed by younger and elder Christians from forms of prayer well composed, without the use of the whole form as a prayer. And if I may have leave to speak the language of a judicious author, that wrote more than forty years ago, I would say, with him, ‘That forms may be useful, and in some cases necessary:’ For,

1. ‘Some, even among Christians and professors, are so rude and ignorant (tho’ it may be spoken to their shame), they cannot tolerably express their desires in prayer; and must such utterly neglect the duty? Is it not better during their gross ignorance, to use the help of other gifts and composures, than not to pray at all? Or to utter that which is senseless and impious? I speak it not to excuse their ignorance, or that they should be encouraged to rest satisfied herein, but for the present necessity.

2. ‘Some again, though they can do it privately, and so far as may suffice in their secret addresses to

God; yet when they are to pray before others, want either dexterity and fitness of expression, readiness of utterance, or confidence to use those abilities they have; whom yet I will not excuse from a sinful bashfulness.

It is possible, that some bodily distemper, or sudden distraction, may befall such as are otherwise able, which may becloud their minds, weaken their memories, and dull their parts, that they may be unfit to express themselves in extemporary conceptions. This may happen in case of melancholy, cold palsies, or the like distempers.

I conclude then, that in the cases aforesaid, or the like, a form may be profitable and helpful. Nor is it a tying up the Spirit, but if conscientiously used, may be both attended with the Spirit's assistance, and find acceptance with God. Yet it will not hence follow that any should satisfy themselves in such staid and stinted forms: much less, that those who have praying abilities, should be enforced by others, to rest in them. If ignorance, bashfulness, defect of memory, or other distempers, may render it excusable and necessary to some, is it fit all should rest in their measure? Where then will be the coveting earnestly the best gifts? Or why should those that are excellently gifted that way, be hindered from the use and exercise of that gift, because others want it?

Thus far this worthy writer. Now though the use of forms in such cases be not unlawful, yet a perpetual confinement to them, will be attended with such inconveniencies as these:

1. 'It much hinders the free exercise of our own 'thoughts and desires,' which is the chief work and business of prayer, namely, to express our desires to God; and whereas our thoughts and affections should direct our words, a set form of words directs our thoughts and affections; and while we bind ourselves to those words only, we damp our inward devotion, and prevent the holy fire from kindling within us; we discourage our active powers and passions from running out on divine subjects, and check the breathings of our souls heaven-ward. The wise man tells us, Prov. xiv. 10. *The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddles not with its joy.* There are secret joys, and unknown bitterneffes, which the holy soul longs to spread before God, and for which it cannot find any exact and correspondent expressions in the best of prayer-books: Now must such a Christian suppress all those thoughts, and forbid himself all that sweet conversation with his God, because it is not written down in the appointed form?

2. The thoughts and affections of the heart that are truly pious and sincere, are wrought in us by the Spirit of God, and if we deny them utterance because they are not found in prayer-books, 'we run the dan-

‘ger of resisting the Holy Ghost, quenching the Holy Spirit,’ and fighting against the kind designs of God towards us, which we are so expressly cautioned against, 1 Thess. v. 19. and which an humble Christian trembles to think of.

3. ‘A confinement to forms cramps and imprisons those powers which God hath given us for improvement and use.’ It silences our natural abilities, and forbids them to act; and it puts a bar upon our spiritual faculties and prevents their growth. To satisfy ourselves with mere forms, to confine ourselves wholly to them, and neglect to stir up and improve our own gifts, is one kind of spiritual sloth, and highly to be disapproved. It is hiding a talent in the earth, which God hath given us on purpose to carry on a trade with heaven. It is an abuse of our knowledge of divine things, to neglect the use of it in our converse with God. It is as if a man that had once used crutches to support him when he was feeble, should always use them; or because he has sometimes found his own thoughts happily expressed in conversation by another person, therefore he will assent to what that other person shall always speak, and never speak his own thoughts himself.

4. ‘It leads us into the danger of hypocrisy, and mere lip-service.’ Sometimes we shall be tempted to express those things which are not the very thoughts of our own souls, and so use words that are not suited to our present wants, or sorrows, or requests; be-

cause those words are put together, and made ready beforehand,

5. The confinement of ourselves to a form, though it is not always attended with formality and indifference, yet 'it is very apt to make our spirits cold and flat, formal and indifferent in our devotion.' The frequent repetition of the same words doth not always awaken the same affections in our hearts, which perhaps they were well suited to do when we first heard or made use of them. When we continually tread one constant road of sentences, or track of expressions, they become like an old beaten path in which we daily travel, and we are ready to walk on without particular notice of the several parts of the way; so in our daily repetition of a form, we neglect due attention to the full sense of the words. But there is something more suited to awaken the attention of the mind in a conceived prayer, when a Christian is making his own way toward God, according to the present inclination of his soul, and urgency of his present wants; and, to use the words of a writer lately cited, 'While we are clothing the sense of our hearts in fit expressions, and as it were digging the matter of our prayers out of our own feelings and experiences, it must needs keep the heart closer at work.'

6. The duty of prayer is very useful to discover to us the frame of our own spirits; but a constant use of forms 'will much hinder our knowledge of ourselves,

‘and prevent our acquaintance with our own hearts,’ which is one great spring of maintaining inward religion in the power of it. Daily observation of our own spirits would teach us what our wants are, and how to frame our prayers before God; but if we tie ourselves down to the same words always, our own observation of our hearts will be of little use, since we must speak the same expressions, let our hearts be how they will. As therefore an inward search of our souls, and intimate acquaintance with ourselves, is a means to obtain the gift of prayer, so the exercise of the gift of prayer will promote this self-acquaintance, which is discouraged and hindered by the restraint of forms.

In the last place, I mention the most usual, most evident and convincing argument against perpetual confinement of ourselves to a form; and that is, ‘because it renders our converse with God very imperfect; for it is not possible that forms of prayer should be composed, that are perfectly suited to all our frames of spirit, and fitted to all our occasions in the things of this life, and the life to come.’ Our circumstances are always altering in this frail and mutable state. We have new sins to be confessed, new temptations and sorrows to be represented, new wants to be supplied. Every change of providence in the affairs of a nation, a family, or a person, requires suitable petitions and acknowledgments. And all these can never be well provided for in any prescribed composition. I confess all our concerns of soul and body may be included in some large and general words of

a form, which is no more suited to one time, or place, or condition, than to another: But generals are cold and do not affect us, nor affect persons that join with us, and whose case he that speaks in prayer should represent before God. It is much sweeter to our own souls, and to our fellow worshippers, to have our fears, and doubts, and complaints, and temptations, and sorrows, represented in most exact and particular expressions, in such language as the soul itself feels when the words are spoken. Now though we should often meet with prayers precomposed, that are fitted to express our present case, yet the gift of prayer is as much better than any form, as a general skill in the work of preaching is to be preferred to any precomposed sermons; as a perfect knowledge in the art of physic is better than any number of receipts; or as a receipt to make a medicine is preferable to one single medicine already made. But he that binds himself always to read printed sermons, will not arrive at the art of preaching; and that man that deals only in receipts, shall never become a skilful physician; nor can the gift of prayer be attained by everlasting confinement to forms.

Perhaps it may make stronger impressions on some persons, and go farther towards the cure of their confinement to forms, and their prejudices against the gift of prayer, to hear what a bishop of the church of England has said on this matter.

‘ In the use of such prescript forms, to which a man
‘ hath been accustomed, he ought to be narrowly

‘ watchful over his own heart, for fear of that lip-
‘ service and formality, which, in such cases, we are
‘ more especially exposed unto.—For any one so to set
‘ down and satisfy himself with his book-prayer, or
‘ some prescript form, and to go no farther, this were
‘ still to remain in his infancy, and not to grow up in
‘ his new creature: This would be, as if a man, who
‘ had once need of crutches, should always afterwards
‘ make use of them, and so necessitate himself to a con-
‘ tinual impotency.—Prayer by book is commonly of
‘ itself something flat and dead, floating for the most
‘ part too much in generalities, and not particular e-
‘ nough for each several occasion. There is not that
‘ life and vigor in it to engage the affections, as when
‘ it proceeds immediately from the soul itself, and is the
‘ natural expression of those particulars whereof we
‘ are most sensible.—It is not easy to express, what a
‘ vast difference a man may find, in respect of inward
‘ comfort and satisfaction, betwixt those private pray-
‘ ers that are thus conceived from the affections, and
‘ those prescribed forms which we say by rote, or read
‘ out of books.’

Bishop WILKINS in his Gift of Prayer.

II. Another extreme to be avoided by all that would obtain the gift of prayer is, ‘ a neglect of prepara-
‘ tion for prayer, and an entire dependence on sudden
‘ motions and suggestions;’ as though we were to expect the perpetual impression of the Holy Spirit upon our minds, as the apostles and inspired saints; as though we had reason to hope for his continual im-

pulses, both in the matter, and manner, and words of prayer, without any forethought, or care, or premeditation of our own. It is true indeed, that when a man hath premeditated the matter of his prayer, and the method of it never so exactly, he ought not so to confine himself, as to neglect or check any warm and pious desires that may arise in his heart in the midst of the duty. But this doth not hinder, but that it is lawful and proper by all useful means to endeavor in general to learn the holy skill of praying, and to prepare also by meditation, or reading, or holy conversation, for the particular exercise of this gift, and the performance of this duty.

Some persons imagine, that if they use no form, they must always pray extempore, or without any premeditation, and are ready to think all free or conceived prayer is extemporary; but these things ought to be distinguished.

Conceived or free prayer is, when we have not the words of our prayer formed beforehand, to direct our thoughts; but we conceive the matter or substance of our addresses to God, first in our minds, and then put those conceptions into such words and expressions as we think most proper. And this may be done by some work of meditation before we begin to speak in prayer; partly with regard to the thoughts, and partly the expressions too.

Extemporary prayer is, when we, without any reflection or meditation beforehand, address ourselves

to God, and speak the thoughts of our hearts as fast as we can conceive them. Now this is most properly done in that which is called *ejaculatory prayer*, when we lift up our souls to God in short breathings of request or thanksgiving, in the midst of any common affairs of life. But there may be also some other occasions for it, namely,

1. I grant, that in secret prayer, there is not the same degree of premeditation necessary, as in public; for there a person takes a greater liberty to express his thoughts, and the desires of his soul, just as they arise within him, which may be very significant to awaken and maintain his own affections in that duty, though perhaps they would be very improper and disagreeable in public.

2. I grant also, that persons of better natural parts, of a lively temper, or ready expression, of great heavenly-mindedness, or such as have been long exercised and experienced in this work, are not bound to premeditate all the materials and method of their prayer in daily worship in a family; nor are ministers, whose graces and talents have been well improved, obliged to think over all the substance of every public address to God beforehand. A short recollection of thought may supply such persons with matter for those constant returns of worship. Nor are Christians, who are possessed of such endowments, at any time bound to an equal degree of premeditation as others are. Bishop WILKINS very pertinently tells us, 'The pro-

‘portion of gifts that a man hath received, is the measure of his work and duty in this case.’ Yet upon some great and solemn occasions, public and private, when seasons are set apart for prayer, a regular premeditation is very useful and advantageous to persons of the highest attainments.

3. I grant farther, that there may be several calls of Providence, which may demand such sudden addresses to God, even from persons of less skill and experience; and they have then reason to hope for more especial assistance from the Spirit of God, while they obey the call of present and necessary duty.

But I am ready to suspect that some persons, who are unskilled in praying, and yet cry out against premeditation, do indulge a degree of spiritual sloth, that secretly prevails upon them, while they profess to be afraid of any thing that comes near to a form.

The arguments that may incline and encourage younger Christians to prepare their thoughts for prayer beforehand are these:

1st *Argument.* ‘The common reason of man and light of nature teach us, that an affair of such solemnity and importance, which requires our utmost care to perform it well, cannot be done without some forethought.’ The skill of a Christian in the inward exercise of grace is to be learned and improved by forethought and diligence; and much more in

the external performance of a religious duty. Now if the light of nature leads us to it, and scripture nowhere forbids, why should we not pursue the practice? The words of scripture seem to encourage such a premeditation, when it tells us, we should *not be rash with our mouth, nor let our heart be hasty to utter any thing before God.* Eccles. v. 2.

2d *Argument.* That the heart should be prepared for prayer is certainly necessary: The *preparation of the heart* is frequently spoken of in the word of God: Now 'the heart cannot be prepared for any act of worship, without some degree of premeditation.' What is the use of reading the word of God just before prayer, in our families? Why are we so often advised to recollect the sermons we hear, when we retire for prayer, but that by premeditation we may be better fitted with materials for this duty?

3d *Argument.* 'There can be no such thing as learning to pray in a regular way without it.' The distinction of the nature of prayer into its several parts, *adoration, confession, petition*, is all useless, if we must not think beforehand. The excellent rules that ministers lay down to teach us to pray, are mere trifling, if we must not think beforehand. If we may not consider what our sins are, what our wants, and what our mercies, before we speak in prayer, there is no possibility of ever learning to perform this part of christian worship with any tolerable measure of decency or profit. An utter aversion to think beforehand

(whatever the pretences are) will be a most effectual bar against the attainment of the gift of prayer in any considerable degree.

4th *Argument.* 'Due preparation for prayer is the way to serve God with our best.' But for younger Christians, unskilled in this work, to rush always into the presence of God in solemn prayer, without due forethought, even when there is time allowed for it; and to pour out words before God at all adventures, is no sign of that high reverence which they owe to so awful a majesty, before whom angels veil their faces, who is jealous of his own worship, and abhors the sacrifice of fools.

If we utterly neglect preparation, we shall be ready to fall into many inconveniencies.

Sometimes we shall be constrained to make long and indecent stops in prayer, not knowing what to say next. At other times we shall be in danger of saying those things that are very little to the purpose, and of wandering far from our purposed subject and design, which can never be acceptable to God. And sometimes, when the mind is not regularly furnished, the natural spirits are put into a hurry, and we run into a confused, incoherent, and impertinent rhapsody of words, whereby both God may be dishonored, and our own edification, and the edification of others spoiled; while the Spirit of God stands afar off from us for a season; it may be on purpose to reprove our negligence of a wise and holy care to learn to pray.

Some such unhappy practices as these in the last age, have given great offence to the pious, and been a stumbling-block and scandal to the profane. The wicked and profane world have taken occasion from hence to throw loads of reproach on all *conceiv-
ed* prayer, under the name of praying *extempore*, and have endeavored to render all prayer without books and forms as odious as possible under this name. The more sober and pious part of the church of England, that usually worship God by liturgies and precomposed forms, have been too ready to give ear to these reproaches, and have by this means been confirmed in their confinement to liturgies and prayer-books; they have been hardened hereby against attempting to seek the gift of prayer themselves, and been tempted to oppose and censure those who have attained it. No small share of this public scandal will be found at the door of those few bold, ignorant, and careless men, who have been guilty of such rash and thoughtless addresses to God, under the pretence of praying by the Spirit.

In opposition to this practice of premeditation, some pious and sincere Christians may say, ‘I have now
‘ and then meditated many things which I designed
‘ to speak in prayer; but when I came to pray, I have
‘ found my thoughts enlarged beyond all my prepara-
‘ tions, and carried away to dwell in prayer upon sub-
‘ jects and petitions of a very different kind, and in a
‘ much more lively manner to express my thoughts,
‘ than I had before conceived.’ Now I would per-

suade such a person to receive this divine assistance, not as an argument to neglect premeditation, for the future, but as a reward of his diligence in preparing his heart beforehand for this work.

Another Christian will tell me, that sometimes when he has thought over many materials for his prayer before, he has found a greater confusion in his mind, between his former preparations and his present suggestions, than if he prayed in an extemporary way.

In reply to this objection, I must confess that I have sometimes had the same unhappy experience; but I impute it to one of these three defects:

1. 'Either my premeditation was very slight and imperfect,' as to the matter or method; so that I had not ranged the materials of my prayer in any settled form and order in my memory, but left them almost as much at uncertainty, as new thoughts that might occur to my mind in praying. And it is more troublesome sometimes to mend and finish what is very imperfect, than to make entirely new.

2. Or perhaps my premeditation had been chiefly 'the work of my head, without so due a consultation of the frame of my heart.' I had prepared my head, but not my heart for prayer; and then it is no wonder that when the heart comes to be warmly engaged in praying, it runs far away from the mere premedi-

tation of the head; and sometimes betwixt both, creates a confusion in the mind.

3. Or it may be, 'my soul hath been out of frame, 'and indisposed for prayer;' and then I would not lay the fault upon premeditation, which would have been as bad or worse without it.

But where my preparations both of head and heart hath been carefully and wisely managed, I have had several experiences of the conveniency and usefulness of it, especially in my younger years, and upon some extraordinary and solemn occasions.

After all, if some particular persons have conscientiously, and with due diligence, attempted this way, and find they always pray more usefully, and more honorably, with more regularity and delight, by the mere preparation of the heart for this duty, without fixing the parts and method of their prayer in their memory beforehand, they must follow those methods of devotion themselves, which they have found most effectually to attain the best ends; but not forbid the use of premeditation to others, whom God hath owned and approved in that way.

And let this be observed, that it is but few Christians that attain to so great a readiness and regularity in the gift of prayer, without learning by premeditation; far greater is the number of those whose performances are very mean, for want of thinking beforehand.

Having thus endeavored to secure you from these two dangerous extremes, namely, *a perpetual confinement to forms* on the one hand, and a *neglect of all premeditation* on the other; I proceed:

In the GIFT of PRAYER we are to consider these five things: The *matter*, the *method*, the *expression*, the *voice*, and the *gesture*. I shall treat of each of these at large.

S E C T III.

Of the MATTER of PRAYER.

FIRST, 'It is necessary to furnish ourselves with proper MATTER, that we may be able to hold much converse with God;' to entertain ourselves and others agreeably and devoutly in worship; to assist the exercise of our own graces and others, by a rich supply of divine thoughts and desires in prayer, that we may not be forced to make too long and indecent pauses, whilst we are performing that duty; nor break off abruptly, as soon as we have begun, for want of matter; nor pour out abundance of words to dress up narrow and scanty sense, for want of variety of devout thoughts.

I shall therefore, *first*, propose some *rules* in order to furnish ourselves with proper MATTER for prayer;

and then lay down some directions concerning these materials of prayer, with which our souls are furnished.

Rules to furnish us with MATTER, are these :

1st Rule. ‘Labor after a large acquaintance with
‘all things that belong to religion;’ for there is nothing that relates to religion, but may properly make some part of the matter of our prayer. This is therefore the most general advice, and the most universal rule that can be given, in this case ; let us daily seek after a more extensive, and more affecting knowledge of God and of ourselves : A great acquaintance with God in his nature, in his person, in his perfections, in his works, and in his word, will supply us with abundant furniture for invocation, adoration, and praise—for thanksgiving and blessing ; and will suggest to us many arguments in pleading with God for mercy. An intimate acquaintance with ourselves, and a lively sense of our own frames of spirit, our wants, our sorrows, and our joys, will also supply us with proper thoughts for confession, for petition, and for giving thanks. We should acquaint ourselves therefore with the word of God in a great degree ; for it is there he reveals himself to us, and there he discovers us also to ourselves. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you, in all wisdom, that you may be furnished with petitions and praises.

We should also be watchful observers of the dealings of God with us in every ordinance and in every

ry providence, and know well the state of our own souls. We should observe the working of our hearts towards God, or towards the creature, and call ourselves to account often, and often examine our temper and our life, both in our natural, our civil, and religious actions. For this purpose, as well as upon many other accounts, it will be of great advantage to keep by us in writing, some of the most remarkable providences of God, and instances of his anger or mercy towards us, and some of our most remarkable carriage towards him, whether sins or duties, or the exercises of grace. Such observations and remarks in our daily walking with God, will be a growing treasury to furnish us for petition and praise: This seems to be the meaning of those scriptures where we read *of watching unto prayer*, Eph. vi. 18. and 1 Pet. iv. 7. This will make us always ready to say something to God in prayer, both concerning him, and concerning ourselves. Let our judgments be constantly well stored, and our graces and affections be lively, and lead us to the duty, and for the most part some proper matter will naturally arise, and flow with ease and pleasure.

2d Rule. 'Let the nature of this duty of prayer, as divided into its several parts, be impressed upon your hearts, and dwell in your memories.' Let us always remember that it contains in it these several parts of worship, namely, *invocation, adoration, confession, petition, pleading, profession or self-resignation, thanksgiving, and blessing*; which that we may retain

the better in our minds, may be summed up in these four lines :

Call upon God, adore, confess,
Petition, plead, and then declare
You are the Lord's, give thanks and blefs,
And let *Amen* confirm the prayer.

And by a recollection of these several parts of prayer, we may be assisted to go on step by step, and to improve in the gift of performance of this part of worship.

It would tend also to improve the GIFT of PRAYER, if such persons as have time and capacity would set down all these parts of prayer as common-places, and all the observable passages that occur in reading the holy scriptures, or other authors ; or such passages as we hear delivered in prayer that are very affecting to our souls, should be written down and registered under those heads. This would preserve such thoughts and expressions in our memories, which have had a peculiar quickening influence upon us. Bishop WILKINS, in his treatise of prayer, has given us such collections of scripture, and Mr. HENRY, in a late book, has furnished us with a great many more, and judiciously ranged under their proper subjects.

3d Rule. 'Do not content yourselves merely with
'generals, but if you would be furnished with larger
'supplies of matter, descend to particulars, in your
'confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings.' Enter in-

to a particular consideration of the attributes, the glories, the graces, and the relations to God. Express your sins, your wants, and your sorrows, with a particular sense of the mournful circumstances that attend them; it will enlarge your hearts with prayer and humiliation, if you confess the aggravations that increase the guilt of your sins, namely, whether they have been committed against knowledge, against the warnings of conscience, &c. It will furnish you with matter for thankfulness, if you run over the exalting and heightening circumstances of your mercies and comforts, namely, that they are great, and spiritual, and eternal, as well as temporal; that they were granted before you sought them, or as soon as asked, &c. And let your petitions and your thanksgivings in a special manner, be suited to the place and circumstances of yourselves, and those that you pray with, and those that you pray for.

Our burdens, our cares, our wants, and sins are many; so are our mercies also, and our hopes; so are the attributes of our God, his promises and his graces; if we open our mouths wide, he will fill and satisfy us with good things, according to his word. If generals were sufficient for us, one very short form would make all others needless; it would be enough to express ourselves in this manner to God: “O
“ Lord, thou art great and good, but we are vile sin-
“ ners; give us all the mercies we stand in need of for
“ time, and for eternity, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST;
“ and through him accept all our thanksgivings, for

“whatsoever we have and hope for: To the Father,
“Son, and Holy Spirit, be eternal glory, *Amen.*”

This is a most general and comprehensive prayer, and includes in it every thing necessary: But there is no Christian can satisfy his soul, to go from day to day to the mercy-seat, and say nothing else to God but this. A saint in a right frame loves to pour out his soul to God in a hundred particulars; and God expects to see his children sensibly affected with their own special wants, and his peculiar mercies, and to take notice of the lesser, as well as of the more considerable circumstances of them. Let us not be straitened in ourselves then, for the hand of God and his heart are not straitened. Our Lord Jesus bids us *ask*, and promises *it shall be given.* Matt. vii. 7. The apostle Paul bids us *in every thing by prayer and supplication to make known our requests to God.* Phil. iv. 6. And the apostle James tells us, *we receive not, because we ask not.* James iv. 2.

4th Rule. “In order to furnish our minds with matter for prayer, it is very convenient, at solemn seasons of worship, to read some part of the word of ‘God,’ or some spiritual treatise written by holy men, or to converse with fellow Christians about divine things, or to spend some time in recollection or meditation of things that belong to religion. This will not only supply us with divine matter, but will compose our thoughts to a solemnity. Just before we engage in that work, we should be absent a little from the

world, that our spirits may be freer for converse with God; we may borrow matter for prayer from the word which we read, from inward reflections of our own souls, as well as from holy conferences; and many a saint hath found this true, that *while he mused the fire burned* within him, Psal. xxxix. 3. and while we speak to men about the affairs of religion and inward piety, we shall certainly find something to say to God.

5th Rule. ‘ If we find our hearts, after all, very
‘ barren, and hardly know how to frame a prayer be-
‘ fore God of ourselves, it has been oftentimes useful
‘ to take a book in our hand, wherein are contained
‘ some spiritual meditations in a petitionary form, some
‘ devout reflections, or excellent patterns of prayer;’
and above all, the psalms of David, some of the prophecies of Isaiah, some chapters in the gospels, or any of the epistles. Thus we may lift up our hearts to God in secret, in short requests, adorations, and thanksgivings, according as the verses or paragraphs we read are suited to the case of our own souls. This has obtained the name of *mixed prayer*; of which there is a farther account under the fifth head of the last chapter.

This many Christians have experienced as a very agreeable help, and of great advantage in their secret retirement; that when they could not of themselves speak a prayer to God, they could yet interline what they read with holy breathings toward God with fervent petitions; and by this means they have found

their souls warmed, and oftentimes in the sight of God have performed this duty more agreeably in this method than other persons of a larger and more extensive gift with great furniture of matter, and much fluency of language. Nor can I disapprove of what Bishop WILKINS says concerning secret prayer, namely, 'That it is not always necessary here that a man should still keep on in a continued frame of speech, but in private devotions a man may take a greater freedom both for his phrase and matter. He may sometimes be at a stand, and make a pause; there may be intermissions and blank spaces in respect to speech, wherein by meditation he may recover new matter to continue in this duty.'

6th Rule. 'If you find your heart so very dry and unaffected with the things of religion, that you can say nothing at all to God in prayer; that you have no divine matter occurs to your thoughts, go and fall down humbly before God, and tell him, with a grievous complaint, that you can say nothing to him; that you can do nothing but groan and cry before him: go and tell him, that without his Spirit you cannot speak one expression; that without immediate assistances from his grace you cannot proceed in his worship; tell him humbly, that he must lose a morning or an evening sacrifice, if he condescends not to send down fire from heaven upon the altar. Plead with him earnestly for his own Spirit, if it be but in the language of sighs and tears; beg that he would never suffer your heart to be so hard, nor your soul to be so

empty of divine things: That he would not only now, but at all times furnish you for so glorious a work as this of converse with himself; and God knows the mind of his own Spirit, and he hears those *groanings that cannot be uttered*, and he understands their language, when the soul is, as it were, imprisoned, and shut up that it cannot vent itself. Our heavenly Father *hears the groans of the prisoner*. Psal. cii. 20.— And there hath been glorious communion maintained with God before the end of that season of worship, when at the beginning of it the saint could say nothing else but, *Lord, I cannot pray*.

Let it be noted here, that when there is such a heaviness and deadness upon the spirit, such a coldness or distraction in his worship, and such an averfeness or reluctance in the mind, it ought to be a matter of humiliation and deep self-abasement before God; especially when at any time we are sensible that it is owing to our own negligence, or to some late guilt bro't upon the conscience. Earnestly we should beg pardon for it, and power against it; and, as Bishop WILKINS says, ‘What we want in the degrees of our duty, we should be sure to make up in humility; and this will be the most proper improvement of our failings, when we can strengthen ourselves by our very infirmities.’

I proceed now to lay down some directions concerning the *matter* of our prayers, how to manage it right.

Direction 1. ‘Do not think it absolutely necessary
‘to insist upon all the parts of prayer in every address
‘to God;’ though in our stated and solemn prayers
there are but few of them that can be well left out.
What we omit at one time, we may perhaps pursue
at another with more lively affections, that so we may
fulfil all our errands at the throne of God.

• But let us be sure to insist most upon those things
which are warmest in our own hearts, especially in se-
cret; and this is a good advice, even in social prayers,
when those things which we are deeply affected with,
are such as the company that joins with us may pro-
perly be concerned in too. Also let those parts of pray-
er have the largest share in the performance, for which
our spirit is best prepared, and with which it is most
sensibly impressed at the present season, whether it be
adoration, petition, confession, or thanksgiving. This
will not only furnish us with matter, but will keep
our spirits lively in the work, and will be the best
means to affect those that join with us, and to call
their graces into exercise. Those things indeed which
our fellow worshippers cannot be concerned in, are
better laid aside till we come to speak to God alone.

Direction 2. ‘Suit the matter of your prayer to
‘the special occasion of each particular duty, to the
‘circumstances of the time, place, and persons with,
‘and for whom you pray.’ This will be another spring
of matter, and will direct you to the choice of proper
thoughts and language for every part of prayer.

(1.) *The time.* If it be morning, then we adore God as the watchful shepherd of Israel, that slumbers not, nor sleeps. Then we confess our inability to have defended ourselves through all the hours of darkness, while nature and our active powers lay, as it were, useless and dead: Then we give thanks to him, that he hath secured us from the spirits of darkness, and given us rest in measure, and raised us in peace: *I laid me down and slept, with comfort; I awake, for the Lord sustained me.* Psal. iii. 5. Then we petition for divine counsel in all the affairs of the day, and the presence of God with us, through all the cares, businesses, dangers, and duties of it.

In the evening we give thanks to God for the mercies of the day, for which we offered our petitions in the morning. We confess the sins and follies of the day, and humble our souls before God: We petition for proper mercies the succeeding night, with expressions of adoration, confession, and self-resignation, suited to the time. Psal. iv. 8. *I will lie down in peace, O Lord, and sleep, for thou alone makest me to dwell in safety.*

Thus when we pray before or after meat; thus on the Lord's day, or our common days of business; in a time of war or peace; a season of public or private rejoicing; a day of trouble and humiliation; let the several expressions of our prayer, in the various parts of it, be suited to the particular season.

(2.) *The place and the persons.* If in our secret retirements, then we adore God in this language: "O Lord God, who see'st in secret, who knowest the way that I take, thou hast commanded that thy children should seek thee in their closets, and thou hast promised to reward them openly." Here also we ought to confess our more particular sins, which the world knows not, and pour out our whole souls before God, with great freedom and plainness: Tell him all our follies, our infirmities, our joys, and sorrows; our brightest hopes, and our most gloomy and dismal fears, and all the inward workings of our hearts, either towards himself, or towards the creatures. Then we converse with God aright in prayer, when we, as it were, maintain a divine friendship with him in secret, and in our humble addresses hold correspondence with him as our heavenly and condescending Friend.

When we pray in a family, the matter must be suited to the circumstances of the household, in confession of family sins, petitions, and thanksgivings for family mercies; whether those with whom we live are sick or in health; whether they are in distress or in peace; whether fixed in their habitations, or removing; and our language to God ought to be suited to this variety of conditions.

If we pray among a select society of Christians, we draw near unto God with holy boldness, something like what we use in our duties of secret worship; we

have reason to take more freedom among those that are fellow saints, and whose hearts have felt many of the same workings with our own. Then, when our faith is lively, we should give thanks to God for our election in Christ Jesus, for the atonement and righteousness of the Son of God, in which we humbly hope to have an interest; for the enlightening and sanctifying work of his own Spirit upon our hearts; for our expectations of eternal glory: And by expressing the joys of our faith to God, we may often be made a means, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, to raise the faith and joy of others.

In public worship, or family devotions, where saints and sinners are present, a minister, or a Christian that speaks in prayer, should consider the circumstances of the whole congregation, or family, and plead for suitable mercies. But I think he should not be ashamed to express his faith and hope when he speaks to God, where there are many to join with him in that holy language, though every single hearer cannot heartily join and consent. Perhaps this may be a way to make unconverted persons that are present blush, and be ashamed, and be inwardly grieved; that they are forced to leave out many of the expressions of prayer used by the minister, and are convinced in themselves, and confounded, because they cannot join in the same language of faith and hope, joy and thankfulness. For it is not necessary that every worshipper should lift up his soul to God according to every sentence spoken in social prayer, but only in such as are suited to

his own case and state, and such as he can sincerely speak to God himself.

Direction 3. 'Do not affect to pray long for the sake of length, or to stretch out your matter by labor and toil of thought, beyond the furniture of your own spirit.' God is not the more pleased with prayers, merely because they are long, nor are Christians ever the more edified. It is much better to make up by the frequency of our devotions what we want in the length of them, when we feel our spirits dry, and our hearts straitened. We may also cry to God for the aids of his own Holy Spirit, even in the middle of our prayer, to carry us forward in that work: but every man is not fit to pray long. God has bestowed a variety of natural as well as spiritual talents and gifts upon men; nor is the best Christian, or a saint of the greatest gifts, always fit for long prayers; for hereby he may fall into many inconveniencies.

The inconveniencies of affected length in prayer are these:

(1.) Sometimes a person is betrayed by an affectation of long prayers, into crude, rash, and unseemly expressions in the presence of God; such as are unworthy of his divine majesty, and unbecoming our meanness: Sometimes he is forced into impertinent digressions, and wanders away from the subject in hand, till his thoughts again recover themselves; and true spiritual worship is hereby hindered and corrupt.

ed. We shall rather therefore take the advice of Solomon upon this account. Eccles. v. 2. *Be not rash to utter any thing before God; God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few.*

(2.) We are tempted hereby to tautologies, to say the same things over and over again, which our Saviour highly blames. Matt. vi. 7. *When ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathens do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking.* Sometimes, indeed, in the midst of our warm affections in prayer, we are delightfully constrained to a repetition of the same words through mere fervency of spirit, and there are instances of it in scripture; but for the most part our repetitions are such as evidence not the fervency, but the barrenness of our minds, and the slowness of our frame.

(3.) Again, we shall be in danger, through an affectation of length, of tiring those that join with us, especially when a prayer is drawn out to many words, with much dullness and deadness of spirit, and without an agreeable variety of thought. I confess, when the Spirit is poured out in plentiful degrees upon men, and upon some extraordinary occasions, persons have continued for an hour or two together, with a delightful variety of matter and expression; and instead of toil and labor to hold on, they found it difficult to break off; their souls have been all the while near to God, and they have held the attention of those that joined with them, and kept their devotion warm.—

Our fathers have seen and felt it; but that spirit is much departed in our day, and there are seldom found amongst us any great lengths of prayer, with equal affection and devotion, maintained either in ourselves or others through so long a duty.

(4.) We are tempted also sometimes by this means, to exceed the season that is allotted for us in prayer, especially where others are to succeed in the same work, or else we intrench, it may be, upon other parts of worship that are to follow; hereby some of our fellow worshippers are made uneasy, and when persons are under a necessary engagement to be elsewhere by an appointed time, or to be engaged in other duties, the latter part of their devotion is generally spoiled. It may be remarked here, that even when Jacob wrestled with the angel, he was required to *let him go, for it was break of day*. Gen. xxxii. 26. As we must not make one duty to thrust out another, so neither should we manage any duty so as to make it a hard task to ourselves, or a toil to others, but a pleasure and spiritual entertainment to both.

(5.) I might add, in the last place, that by this excessive affectation of length in prayer without an equal degree of the spirit of prayer and lively devotion, some imprudent Christians have given too much occasion to the profane scoffers of the age, and hereby the wicked of the earth have rendered these methods of converse with God ridiculous among their own company, and have exposed and reproached the

gift and spirit of prayer, because of our irregular performance of that part of worship; whereas, when the Spirit of God, by his own immediate and uncommon influences, draws out the heart to continue in prayer, these inconveniences will not follow.

Therefore while I am discouraging young Christians from that affectation of long prayer, which arises from an ostentation of their parts, from a superstitious hope of pleasing God better by saying many words, or from a trifling frame of spirit, I would not have my readers imagine that the shortest prayers are always the best. Our sinful natures are too ready to put off God in secret or in the family, with a few minutes of worship, from mere sloth and weariness of holy things, which is equally to be blamed; for hereby we omit a great part of the necessary work of prayer in confessions, petitions, pleadings for mercy, or thanksgivings. Nor do I think that prayer in public assemblies should be so short, as though the only design of it were a mere preface before the sermon, or a benediction after it; whereas social prayer is one considerable part (if not the chief duty) of public worship, and we ought generally to continue so long in it, as to run through the most necessary and important purposes of a social address to the throne of grace. Christian prudence will teach us to determine the length of our prayers agreeably to the occasion and present circumstances, and according to the measure of our own ability for this work.

S E C T. IV.

Of the METHOD of PRAYER.

I PROCEED now to the *second thing* to be considered in the gift of prayer, and that is *method*.

‘ *Method* is necessary to guide our thoughts, to regulate our expressions, and dispose the several parts of prayer in such an order as is most easy to be understood by those that join with us, and most proper to excite and maintain our own devotion and theirs.’ Though there is not a necessity of the same just and exact regularity here, as in preaching the word, yet a well regulated prayer is most agreeable to men, honorable in the sight of the world, and not at all the less pleasing to God. The Spirit of God, when he is poured out as a Spirit of Prayer in the most glorious measures, doth not contradict the rules of a natural and reasonable method, although his methods may have infinite variety in them.

Some method must be used in order to secure us from confusion, that our thoughts may not be ill sorted, or mingled and huddled together in a tumultuary and unseemly manner. This will be of use also to prevent tautologies or repetitions of the same thing, when each part of prayer is disposed into its proper place: This will guard us against roving digressions, when

we have ranged our thoughts into order throughout every step of our prayer; our judgment infers what sort of matter properly and naturally follows that which we are at present speaking; so that there is no need to fill up any empty spaces with matter that is not proper, or not suited to the purpose. Those persons that profess to pray without observing any method at all, if they are very acceptable and affecting to others in their gift, do certainly use a secret and a natural method, and proper connections of one thing with another, though they themselves have not laid down any rule to themselves for it, nor take notice of the order of their own prayers.

The general *rules of method* in prayer, which I would recommend to you, are these three:

Rule 1. ‘Let the general and the particular heads in prayer be well distinguished, and usually let generals be mentioned first, and particulars follow.’ As for example; in adoration we acknowledge, that God is all over glorious in his nature, self-sufficient and all-sufficient, and we mention this with the deepest reverence, and universal abasement of soul; and then we descend to praise him for his particular attributes of power, wisdom, goodness, &c. and exercise our particular graces accordingly. So, in confession, we first acknowledge ourselves vile sinners, corrupt by nature, and of the same sinful mass with the rest of mankind, and then we confess our particular iniquities, and our special guilt. So, in our petitions, we first pray for the

churches of Christ all over the world, and his history and his gospel throughout the earth, and then we petition for the churches in this nation, in this city, or that particular church of Christ to which we belong.

Sometimes indeed there is a beauty also in summing up all the particulars at last in one general; as when we have praised God for his several perfections to the utmost of our capacity, we cry out, "Lord, thou art exalted above all our praises; thou art altogether great and glorious." Or, when we have confessed several particular sins, we fall down before God, as persons that are all over defiled and guilty. When we have petitioned for particular mercies, we then ask of God, who is able to do for us above what we can ask or think, that he would bestow all other comforts, and every blessing that he knows needful for us. But still this rule must be observed, that general and particular heads ought to be so distinguished, as to make our method of prayer natural and agreeable.

Rule 2. 'Let things of the same kind for the most part be put together in prayer.' We should not run from one part to another, by starts and sudden wild thoughts, and then return often to the same part again, going backward and forward in confusion: this bewilders the mind of him that prays, disgusts our fellow worshippers, and injures their devotion. This will lead us into vain repetitions, and we shall lose ourselves in the work.

Yet I would give this limitation, that sometimes the same matter may come in naturally, under two or three parts of prayer, and be properly disposed of in two or three places by a judicious worshipper. As the mention of some of the attributes of God under the head of *adoration*, where we praise him for his own perfections; and under the head of *pleading* for mercy, when we use his power, his wisdom, or his goodness, as an argument to enforce our petitions; and under the head of *thanksgiving* also, when we bless him for the benefits that proceed from his goodness, his power, or his wisdom: So in the beginning of a prayer in our invocation of God, we put in a sentence or two, of confession of our unworthiness, and of petition for divine assistance; so toward the conclusion of prayer, it is not amiss to use a sentence or two consisting of such matter as may leave a suitable impression upon our minds, though perhaps something of the same matter may have been before mentioned; as, to ask forgiveness for all the imperfections of our holy things; to entreat that God would hear all our requests in the name of our Lord Jesus; to recommend our prayers into the hands of our Redeemer, our great high-priest, and to commit our whole selves to the conduct of divine grace, till we are brought safe to glory. But then all this must be done with such a variety of expression, and with such proper connections, as will render it agreeable in itself, and will entertain the minds of those that join with us, and give them delight, rather than hinder their devotion.

Rule 3. ‘ Let those things, in every part of prayer, which are the proper objects of our judgment, be first mentioned, and then those that influence and move our affections ;’ not that we should follow such a manner of prayer as is more like preaching, as some imprudently have done, speaking many divine truths without the form or air of praying : It is a very improper custom, which some persons have taken up and indulged, when divine truths come to be mentioned in prayer, they run great lengths in a doctrinal way ; yet there is occasion frequently in prayer, under the several parts of it, for the recollecting of divine truths, and these lay a proper foundation for warm and pathetical expressions to follow : As, “ O Lord thou art good, and thou dost good ; why should I continue so long without partaking of thy goodness ? “ My sins are great, and my iniquities have many aggravations ; O that I might mourn for them before thee in secret ! O that I could pour out my soul before thee in sorrow, because of multiplied offences ! ” Thus let the language of affection follow the language of our judgment, for this is the most rational and natural method.

Having laid down these *general rules*, the best *particular method* I can direct you to, is, that division of the parts of prayer mentioned in the foregoing chapter. I know not a more natural order of things than this is. To begin with *invocation*, or calling upon God ; then proceed to *adore* that God whom we invoke, because of his various glories ; we are then na-

turally led to the work of *confession*, considering what little contemptible creatures we are in the presence of so adorable a God, and to humble ourselves because of our abounding sins, and our many necessities: When we have given praise to a God of such holiness, and having spread our wants before God, *petitions* for mercy naturally follow, and *pleading* with such divine arguments as the Spirit, and the word of God put into our mouths, should accompany our requests; after all, we *resign* ourselves into the hands of God, and express our *self-aedication* to him; then we recollect the mercies that we have received, and out of gratitude pay him our tribute of honor and thanks. And as he is glorious in himself, and glorious in his works of power and grace, so we *bless* him, and ascribe everlasting glory to him.

I cannot but think it a very useful thing for young beginners in the work of prayer, to remember all these heads in their order, to dispose of their thoughts and desires before God in this method, proceeding regularly from one part to another. And as this must needs be useful to assist and teach us to pray in public, so sometimes in our secret retirements it may not be improper to pursue the same practice.

Yet it must be granted, there is no necessity of confining ourselves to this, or to any other set method, no more than there is of confining ourselves to a form in prayer.

Sometimes the mind is so divinely full of one particular part of prayer, perhaps of *thanksgiving*, or of *self-resignation*, that high expressions of gratitude, and of devoting ourselves to God, break out first.

“ Lord, I am come to devote myself to thee in
“ an everlasting covenant; I am thine through thy
“ grace, and through thy grace I will be thine for-
“ ever.” Or thus, “ Blessed be thy name, O Lord
“ God Almighty, for thine abundant benefits, that
“ fill my soul with the sense of them, for thou hast
“ pardoned all my iniquities, and healed all my dis-
“ eases.”

Sometimes, even in the beginning of a prayer, when we are insisting on one of the first parts of it, we receive a divine hint from the Spirit of God, that carries away our thoughts and our whole souls, with warm affections into another part, that is of a very different kind, and that usually perhaps comes in near the conclusion: And when the Spirit of God thus leads us, and our souls are in a very devout frame, we are not to quench the Spirit of God, in order to tie ourselves to any set rules of prescribed method.

There is no necessity that persons of great talents, of divine affections, of much converse with God, and that have attained to a good degree of this gift, by long exercise, should bind themselves to any one certain method of prayer. For we find the prayers recorded in holy scripture, are very various in the or-

der and disposition of them, as the Spirit of God and the divine affections of those saints led and guided them: But still there is some method observed, and may be traced and demonstrated.

I am persuaded that if young Christians did not give themselves up, in their first essays of prayer, to a loose and negligent habit of speaking every thing that comes uppermost, but attempted to learn this holy skill, by a recollection of the several parts of prayer, and disposing their thoughts into this method, there would be great numbers in our churches that would have arrived at a good degree of the gift of prayer, and be capable afterwards of giving a more glorious and unbounded loose to their souls, without breaking the rules of just and natural method; and that to the great edification of our churches, as well as of their own families.

S E C T. V.

Of Expression in Prayer.

III. **T**HE third thing that relates to the gift of prayer, is *expression*.

Though prayer be the proper work of the heart, yet in this present state, in secret as well as in social prayer, the language of the lips is an excellent aid in

this part of worship. A person indeed may pray heartily and effectually, and yet make use of no words: sometimes the desires of the heart may be too big to be expressed when the Spirit of God is with us in plentiful operations, and assists us to plead with sighs and *groans which cannot be uttered*, as Rom. viii. 26. Persons that are dumb may think over their wants, and raise their souls to God in longing desires and wishes for grace in a time of need; nor is there any necessity of using language upon God's account, for he knows the desires of our hearts, and our most secret breathings towards him. He that hears without ears, understands us without our words. Yet as language is of absolute necessity in social prayer, that others may join with us in our addresses to God; so for the most part we find it necessary in secret too; for there are few persons of so steady and fixed a power of meditation, as to maintain their devotion warm, and to converse with God, or with themselves profitably, without words.

Expressions are useful, not only to dress our thoughts, but sometimes to form and shape, and perfect the ideas and affections of our minds. The use of words makes us doubly sensible of the things we conceive; they serve to awaken the holy passions of the soul as well as to express them. Our expressions sometimes follow and reveal the warmer motions of the heart, and sometimes they are dictated by the judgment, and are a means to warm the heart, and excite those holy motions. They fix and engage all our powers in reli-

gion and worship, and they serve to regulate as well as to increase our devotion. We are bid to *take unto us words, and turn to the Lord, and say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.* Hosea xiv. 2. And in the Psalms of David we often read of his *crying to the Lord with his voice, and making supplication with his tongue*, when the matter of his prayer is such, that we have abundant reason to believe that it was performed in secret.

Here I shall *first* lay down some *directions* how to attain a rich treasure of expression in prayer; and, *secondly*, give several rules about the choice and use of words and expressions,

The *directions* to attain a treasure of expression are these:

Direction 1. ‘ Besides the general acquaintance with
 ‘ God and with yourselves, that was prescribed under
 ‘ a former head, labor after the fresh, particular, and
 ‘ lively sense of the greatness and grace of God, and
 ‘ of your own wants, and sins, and mercies, whenever
 ‘ you come to pray;’ this will furnish you with abundance of proper expressions. The passions of the mind, when they are moved, do mightily help the tongue; they fill the mouth with arguments; they give a natural eloquence to those who know not any rules of art; and they almost constrain the dumb to speak. There is a remarkable instance of this in ancient history, when ATYS, the son of CROESUS the

king, who was dumb from his childhood, saw his father ready to be slain, the violence of his passion broke the bonds wherewith his tongue was tied, and he cried out to save him.—Beggars that have a pinching sense of hunger and cold, find out a variety of expressions to tell us their wants, and to plead for relief. Let our spiritual senses therefore be always awake and lively, and our affections always warm, and lead the duty; then words will follow in a greater or less degree.

Direction 2. ‘Treasure up such expressions, especially as you read in scripture, and such as you have found in other books of devotion, or such as you have heard other fellow-Christians make use of, whereby your own hearts have been sensibly moved and warmed.’ Those forms of speaking, that have had great influence and success upon our affections at one time, may probably have a like effect also at other seasons; if so be we take care not to confine ourselves to them constantly, lest formality and thoughtlessness should grow thereby.

Though the limitation of ourselves to a constant set form of words be justly disapproved; yet there is great use of serious, pious, and well composed patterns of prayer, in order to form our expressions, and furnish us with proper praying language. And I wish the assistances which might be borrowed thence, were not as superstitiously abandoned by some persons, as they are idolized by others. But I suppose no persons will disapprove the advice, if I desire them to remem-

ber the more affectionate sentences in the psalms of David, and the complaints of Job, and other holy men, when they breathe out their souls to God in worship.

These, in a nearer and more particular sense, may be called the words which the Holy Spirit teacheth; and whenever they suit our circumstances, they will always be pleasing to God; besides they are such as Christians are most acquainted with, and pious souls are most affected with them. The Spirit of God in praying and preaching will often bless the use of his own language: And I am persuaded, this is one way whereby the Spirit helps our infirmities, and becomes a Spirit of Supplication in us, by suggesting to us particular passages of scripture, that are useful to furnish us both with matter and expression in prayer.

The most authentic judge of fine thoughts and language that our age has produced, assures us of the beauty and glory of the style of scripture, and particularly in this respect, that it is most proper to teach us how to pray. I cannot forbear transcribing this paragraph from the Spectator, June 14, 1712, 'It happens
' very well,' says he, 'that the Hebrew idioms run into
' the English tongue with a particular grace and beau-
' ty: Our language has received innumerable elegan-
' ces and improvements from that infusion of Hebra-
' isms, which are derived to it out of the poetical pas-
' sages of holy writ; they give a force and energy to
' our expressions, warm and animate our language,

‘and convey our thoughts in more ardent and intense
‘phrases, than any that are to be met with in our own
‘tongue; there is something so pathetic in this kind
‘of diction, that it often sets the mind in a flame, and
‘makes our hearts burn within us. How cold and dead,’
saith he, ‘doth a prayer appear that is composed in
‘the most elegant and polite forms of speech, which
‘are natural to our tongue, when it is not heighten-
‘ed by that solemnity of phrase which may be drawn
‘from the sacred writings? It has been said by some of
‘the ancients, that if the Gods were to talk with men,
‘they would certainly speak in PLATO’s style; but
‘I think we may say with justice, that when mortals
‘converse with their Creator, they cannot do it in so
‘proper a style as that of the holy scriptures.’

It would be of excellent use to improve us in the gift of prayer, if in our daily reading the word of God we did observe what expressions were suited to the several parts of this duty; *adoration, confession, petition, or thanksgiving*; and let them be brought into our addresses to God that day. Nay, if we did but remember one verse every day, and fix it into our hearts by frequent meditation, and work it into our prayers morning and evening, it would in time grow up to a treasure of divine sense and language, fit to address our Maker upon all occurrences of life.

And it has been observed, that persons of mean capacity, and no learning, have attained to a good measure of this holy skill of prayer, merely by having their

minds well furnished with words of scripture; and have been able to pour out their hearts before God in a fluency of proper thoughts and language, to the shame of those that have been blessed with brighter parts, and have enjoyed the advantage of a learned education.

Yet I would lay down two *cautions* about the use of scripture language.

‘ One is, that we should not affect too much to impose an illusive sense upon the words of scripture;’ nor use them in our prayers in a signification very different from the true meaning of them. Not that I would utterly disallow and condemn all such illusive expressions; as for instance, that which is frequently used when we desire mercies for our souls and bodies, *to ask the blessings of the upper and the nether springs*. There may be some such phrases used pertinently enough: The commonness of them also makes them something more agreeable; yet if we affect to shew our wit or ingenuity by seeking pretty phrases of scripture, and using them in an illusive sense, very foreign to the original purpose of them, we shall be in danger of leading ourselves into many mistakes in the interpretation of scripture, and expose ourselves sometimes to the peril of mistaking the true sense of a text, by having frequently fixed a false meaning upon it in our prayers.

Another *caution*, in using scripture-language, is this, that we abstain from all those expressions which

‘are of a very dubious sense, and hard to be understood.’ If we indulge the use of such dark sentences in our speaking to God, we might as well pray in an unknown tongue, which is so much disapproved by the Apostle, 1 Cor. xiv. 9, 14. Let not therefore the pomp and sound of any hard Hebrew names, or obscure phrases in scripture, allure us to be fond of them in social prayer, even though we ourselves should know the meaning of them, lest we confound the thoughts of our fellow-worshippers.

Direction 3. ‘Be always ready to engage in holy conference and divine discourse.’ This will teach us to speak of the things of God. Let it be your delightful practice to recollect and talk over with one another, the sermons you have heard, the books of divinity you have been conversant with, those parts of the word of God you have lately read, and especially your own experiences of divine things. Hereby you will gain a large treasure of language to clothe your pious thoughts and affections.

It is a most profitable practice, after you have heard a sermon, to confer with some fellow-Christian that heard it too, and run over all the particulars of it that you can retain in your memory; then retire, and pray them over again, that is, make them the matter and substance of your address to God; plead with him to instruct you in the truths that were mentioned, to incline you to perform the duties recommended, to mourn over and mortify the sins that were reprov-
ed,

to teach you to trust and live upon the promises and comforts proposed, and to wait and hope for the glories revealed in that sermon. Let this be done frequently afterwards in the same week, if the sermon be suited to your case and condition of soul. This will furnish you incredibly with riches of matter and expression for the great duty of prayer.

The reason why we want expressions in prayer, is many times because we use ourselves so little to speak about the things of religion and another world. A man that hath but a tolerable share of natural parts, and no great volubility of speech, learns to talk well upon the affairs of his own trade and business in the world, and scarce ever wants words to discourse with his dealers; and the reason is, because his heart and his tongue are frequently engaged therein. Thus if our affections are kept warm, and we use ourselves frequently to speak of the things of religion to men, we shall learn to express ourselves much better about the same divine concerns when we come before God.

Direction 4. ‘Pray earnestly for the gift of utterance, and seek the blessing of the Spirit of God upon the use of proper means to obtain a treasure of expressions for prayer.’ The great Apostle prays often for a freedom of speech and utterance in his ministry, that he may speak the mystery of Christ, and make it manifest so as he ought to speak, Col. iv. 3, 4. So the gift of utterance in prayer, is a very fit request to be made to God for the advantage of our

own souls, and those that join with us. The wise man tells us, in Prov. xvi. 1. *That the preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.* Let us pray then, that when God hath prepared our heart for his worship, he would also teach our tongue to answer the thoughts and desires of the heart, and to express them in words suitable, and answering to all our inward spiritual affections. A happy variety of expression, and holy oratory in prayer, is one of those *good and perfect gifts that come from above, from God the father of lights,* and knowledge, James i. 17.

The *rules* about the choice and use of proper *expressions* in prayer are these :

Rule 1. 'Choose those expressions that best suit your meaning, that most exactly answer the ideas of your mind, and that are fitted to your sense and apprehension of things.' For the design of prayer is to tell God the inward thoughts of your heart; if you speak, therefore, what is not in the heart, though the words be never so fine and pathetical, it is but a mere mockery of God. Let your tongues be the true interpreters of your minds. When our souls are filled with a lively impression of some of the attributes or works of God, when our hearts are overpowered with a sense of our own guilt and unworthiness, or big with some important request; O what a blessed pleasure is it to hit upon a happy expression, that speaks our very soul, and fulfils all our meaning! and what a pleasure doth

it convey to all that join with us, who have their Spiritual senses exercised ! and it helps to excite in them the same devotion that dictated to us the words we speak : The royal preacher, in Eccl. xii. 10. *Sought out, and gave good heed to find, and to set in order acceptable words* in his sermons, that they might be *as goads and nails fastened by the master of assemblies* : That is, that they might leave a strong and lasting impression on those that hear, that by piercing deep into the heart as goads, they might be fixed as nails. And there is the same reason for the choice of proper words in prayer.

Rule 2. ‘ Use such a way of speaking as may be ‘ most natural and easy to be understood, and most agreeable to those that join with you.’ The Apostle gives this direction to the Corinthians, concerning their public worship : 1 Cor. xiv. 9. *Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken ? for ye shall speak into the air.* Avoid, therefore, all foreign and uncommon words, which are borrowed from other languages, and not sufficiently naturalized, or which are old and worn out of use. Avoid those expressions which are too philosophical, and those which favor too much of mystical divinity. Avoid a long train of dark metaphors, or of expressions that are used only by some particular violent party-men. Avoid length and obscurity in your sentences, and in the placing of your words ; and do not interline your expressions with too many parentheses, which cloud and entangle the sense.

And here I beg leave to give one or two instances of each of these improper methods of speaking; not that ever I heard these very phrases used by any minister or private Christian in prayer. But as vices of the life are rendered most hateful, and are best cured or prevented by seeing them represented in their plainest and most odious colors; so the vices of speech, and improprieties of expression, are best avoided by a plain representation of them in their own complete deformity. This will deter us from coming near them, and make us watchful against all those forms of speaking that border upon these follies. And indeed, without giving examples of each of these faults, I know not how to make the unlearned Christian understand the things he ought to avoid.

By uncommon words, I mean such as are either too new, or too old for common use.

Old and obsolete words are such as these; *we do thee to wit*, for *we acquaint thee*. *Leasing*, for *lying*; a *gin* for a *snare*. Some such words as these yet stand in our translation of the bible; many of these you may find in the old translation of the Psalms in the Common-Prayer-Book, and in the metre of HOPKINS and STERNHOLD; which might be proper in the age when they were written, but are now grown into contempt.

New words are for the most part borrowed from foreign languages, and should not be used in social

prayer, till they are grown so common, that there appears no difficulty to the hearers, nor affectation in the speaker. Such as these, which have a French original: "Thou, O Lord, art our dernier resort," that is, our last refuge. "The whole world is but one great machine managed by thy puissance," that is, an engine managed by thy power. "We are chagrin, because of the hurries and tentations of the malignant spirit," that is, we are vexed and grow uneasy by reason of the temptations of the devil. Or these which are borrowed from the Latin: "The beatific splendours of thy face, irradiate the celestial region, and felicitate the saints: There are the most exuberant profusions of thy grace, and the sempiternal efflux of thy glory."

By philosophical expressions, I intend such as are taught in the academical schools, in order to give learned men a shorter and more comprehensive view of things, or to distinguish nicely between ideas that are in danger of being mistaken without such distinction. As for example, it is not proper to say to God in public prayer, "Thou art hypostatically three, and essentially one. By the plenitude of perfection in thine essence, thou art self-sufficient for thine own existence and beatitude; who in an incomplex manner eminently, though not formally, includest all the infinite variety of complex ideas that are found among the creatures." Such language as this, may be indulged perhaps in secret, by a man that uses himself to think and meditate under these

forms; but his meaner fellow-Christians would no more be edified by them, than by praying in an unknown tongue.

By the language of *mystical divinity*, I mean such incomprehensible sort of phrases, as a sect of divines among the Papists have used, and some few Protestants too nearly imitated. Such are ‘of the deiform
‘fund of the soul, the superessential life, of singing a
‘hymn of silence; that God is an abyss of light, a cir-
‘cle whose centre is every where, and his circumfer-
‘ence no where. The hell is the dark world made
‘up of spiritual sulphur, and other ingredients not
‘united or harmonized, and without that pure bal-
‘samical oil that flows from the heart of God.” These are great swelling words of vanity, that captivate silly people into raptures, by mere sound without sense.

By running long metaphors, I mean the pursuing of a similitude or metaphor, and straining it so far, as to injure the doctrines of religion by a false sense, or very improper expressions. Such was the language of a foolish writer, who bids us ‘give our hearts
‘to the Lord, cut them with the knife of contrition,
‘take out the blood of your sins by confession, after-
‘wards wash it with satisfaction.’ &c.

By expressions that favor too much of *party-zeal*, I mean such as would be useless, if not offensive to Christians of different judgments that join with us in

prayer: We should not in our prayers, too much insist on the corruptions of doctrine and worship in any church, when some of that communion join with us; nor of the infant's interest in the covenant of grace, and baptism the first seal of it, when Baptists are worshipping with us together. Our prayers should not favor of anger and uncharitableness, for we are bid to *lift up holy hands without wrath*, 1 Tim. ii. 18.

When I recommend such expressions as are easy to be understood, it is evident that you should avoid long and entangled sentences, and place your thoughts and words in such an order, as the hearts of the hearers may be able to receive and join in the worship, as fast as their ears receive the words: As in all our conversations and conferences, and discourses, we should labor to make every thing we say to be understood immediately; so especially in prayer, where the affections should be moved; which cannot well be done if the judgment must take much pains to understand the meaning of what is said.

Rule 3. 'Let your language be grave and decent, which is a medium between magnificence and meanness.' Let it be plain, but not coarse. Let it be clean, but not at all lofty and glittering. Job speaks of *choosing his words to reason with God*, Job. ix. 14. Some words are choice and beautiful, others are unseemly and disagreeable. Have a care of all wild, irregular, and vain expressions, that are unsuited to so solemn a part of worship. The best direction I can

give you in this case, is to make use of such language as you generally use in your serious discourses upon religious subjects, when you confer with one another about the things of God. For then the mind is composed to gravity, and the tongue should answer and interpret the mind. The language of a Christian in prayer, is the clothing of his thoughts, or the dress of the soul; and it should be composed like the dress of his body, decent and neat, but not pompous and gaudy; simple and plain, but not careless, uncleanly, or rude.

Avoid, therefore, *glittering language* and *affected style*. When you address God in worship, it is a fault to be ever borrowing phrases from the theatre and profane poets. This does not seem to be the language of Canaan. Many of their expressions are too light, and wild, and airy for so awful a duty. An excessive fondness of elegance, and finery of style in prayer, discovers the same pride and vanity of mind, as an affectation of many jewels and fine apparel in the house of God: It betrays us into a neglect of our hearts and of experimental religion, by an affectation to make the nicest speech, and say the finest things we can, instead of sincere devotion, and praying in the Spirit. Besides, if we will deal in lofty phrases, scripture itself sufficiently abounds with them; and these are the most agreeable to God, and the most affecting to his own people.

Avoid *mean and coarse*, and too *familiar expressions*, such as excite any contemptible or ridiculous

ideas, such as raise any improper or irreverent thoughts in the mind, or base and impure images; for these much injure the devotion of our fellow-worshippers. And it is a very culpable negligence to speak to God in such a rude and unseemly manner, as would ill become us in the presence of our fellow-creatures, when we address ourselves to them. Not but that God hears the language of the meanest soul in secret, tho' he is not capable of expressing himself with all the decencies that are to be desired; yet it is certain, that we ought to seek to furnish ourselves with becoming methods of expression, that so our performance of this duty may be rendered pleasing to those with whom we worship; and there is no necessity of being rough and slovenly, in order to be sincere. Sometimes persons have been guilty of great indecencies, and exposed religion to profane scoffs, by a too familiar mention of the name of Christ, and by irreverent freedoms when they speak to God. I cannot approve of the phrases of 'rolling upon Christ, of swimming 'upon Christ to dry land, of taking a lease of Christ 'for all eternity.' I think we may fulfil that command of coming boldly to the throne of grace without such language, that can hardly be justified from rudeness and immodesty. Persons are sometimes in danger of indecencies from borrowing mean and trivial, or uncleanly similitudes: They rake all the sinks of nastiness to fetch metaphors for their sins, and praying for the coming of Christ, they 'fold up the 'heavens like an old cloke, and shovel days out of the 'way.' By these few instances you may learn what

to avoid; and remember, that words as well as things grow old and uncomely; and some expressions that might appear decent threescore years ago, would be highly improper, and offensive to the ears of the present age. It is, therefore, no sufficient apology for those phrases, that men of great learning and most eminent piety have made use of them.

Rule 4. ‘ Seek after those ways of expression that are pathetical, such as denote the fervency of affection, and carry life and spirit with them;’ such as may awaken and exercise our love, our hope, our holy joy, our sorrow, our fear, and our faith, as well as express the activity of those graces. This is the way to raise, assist, and maintain devotion. We should, therefore, avoid such a sort of style as looks more like preaching, which some persons that affect long prayers have been guilty of, to a great degree. They have been speaking to the people, and teaching them the doctrines of religion, and the mind and will of God, rather than speaking to God the desires of their own minds. They have wandered away from God to preach to men. But this is quite contrary to the nature of prayer; for prayer is our own address to God, declaring our sense of divine things, and pouring out our hearts before him with warm and proper affections. And there are several modes of expression that promote this end: As,

(1.) *Exclamations*, which serve to set forth an affectionate wonder, a sudden surprize, or violent im-

pression of any thing on the mind. Psal. lxxxi. 19. *O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!* Psal. cxxxix. 17. *How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God, how great is the sum of them!* Rom. vii. 24. *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me!*

(2.) *Interrogations*, when the plain sense of any thing we declare unto God is turned into a question, to make it more emphatical and affecting; as, Psal. cxxxix. 7. *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? whither shall I flee from thy presence?* Ver. 21. *Do I not hate them that hate thee?* Rom. vii. 24. *Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

(3.) *Appeals* to God, concerning our own wants and sorrows, our sincere and deep sense of the things we speak to him. John xxi. 17. *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.* So David appeals to God, Psal. lxix. 5. *My sins are not hid from thee.* Psal. lvi. 8. *Thou tellest all our travels, or our wanderings; are not my tears in thy book?* Job. x. vii. *Thou knowest that I am not wicked: My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.* Job xvi. 19.

(4.) *Expostulations*, which are indeed one particular sort of interrogation, and are fit to express not only deep dejections of the mind, but to enforce any argument that is used in pleading with God, either for mercy for his saints, or the destruction of his enemies. Isa. lxiii. 15, 17. *Look down from heaven, behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where*

is thy zeal and thy strength? The sounding of thy bowels and thy mercies towards me, are they restrained? O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways; and hardened our hearts from thy fear? Isa. li. 9, 10. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord: Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it that hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep? Psal. lxxvii. 8. Will the Lord cast off for ever; and will he be favorable no more? Psal. lxxx. 4. O Lord God of Hosts, how long wilt thou be angry? Psal. xliv. 24. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction? God invites his people thus to argue with him. Isa. i. 18. Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord. And holy men, in humble and reverend expostulations, have, with many reasons, pleaded their cause before God, and their words are recorded as our patterns.

(5.) *Options, or wishes, fit to set forth serious and earnest desires. Job vi. 8. O that I might have my request! Psal. cxix. 5. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*

(6.) *Apostrophes, that is, when in the midst of our addresses to God we turn off the speech abruptly to our own souls, being led by the vehemence of some sudden devout thought. So David, in the beginning of the xvith Psalm; Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said to the Lord, thou art my Lord, &c. In meditations, psalms, hymns, or other devotional compositions, these apos-*

trophes may be longer and more frequent; but in prayer they should be very short, except when the speech is turned from one person of the blessed Trinity to another, thus: "Great God, hast thou not promised that thy Son should have the heathen for his inheritance, and that he should rule the nations?—Blessed Jesus, how long ere thou assume this kingdom? When wilt thou send thy Spirit to enlighten and convert the world? When, O eternal Spirit! wilt thou come and shed abroad thy light and thy grace, through all the earth.'

(7.) *Ingeminations*, or redoubling our expressions, which argue an eager and inflamed affection; as Psal. xciv. 1, 2. *O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth! O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself!* Psal. cxxx. 6. *My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning!* And the conclusion of Psal. lxxii. is, *Blessed be the Lord for evermore, Amen and Amen.* But here let us take care to distinguish between those repetitions that arise from real fervency of spirit, and those that are used merely to lengthen out a prayer, or that arise from mere barrenness of heart, and want of matter. It is far better, at least in public prayer, to yield to our present indisposition, and shorten the duty, than to fill up our time with constant repetition; such as, "O Lord, our God, if it be thy blessed will, we intreat thee, we beseech thee, O Lord, have mercy upon us." For though some of these expressions may be properly enough repeated se-

veral times in a prayer, yet filling up every empty space, and stretching out almost every sentence with them, is not agreeable to our fellow worshippers, nor an ornament, nor a help to our devotion, or theirs.

Rule 5. ‘ Do not always confine yourselves to one
‘ set form of words to express any particular request,
‘ nor take too much pains to avoid an expression,
‘ merely because you used it in prayer heretofore.’
Be not over-fond of a nice uniformity of words, nor of perpetual diversity of expression in every prayer.—
It is best to keep the middle between these two extremes. We should seek indeed to be furnished with a rich variety of holy language, that our prayers may always have something new, and something entertaining in them, and not tie ourselves to express one thing always in one set of words, lest this make us grow formal, and dull, and indifferent in those petitions.—
But on the other hand, if we are guilty of a perpetual affectation of new words, which we never before used, we shall sometimes miss our own best and most spiritual meaning, and many times be driven to great impropriety of speech; and, at best, our prayers, by this means, will look like the fruit of our fancy and invention, and labor of the head, more than the breathings of the heart. The imitation of those Christians and ministers that have the best gifts, will be an excellent direction in this as well as in the former cases.

S E C T. VI.

Of the VOICE in PRAYER.

IV. **T**HE fourth thing to be considered in the gift of prayer is the VOICE.

Though the beauty of our expressions, and the tuneableness of our voice, can never render our worship more acceptable to God, the infinite Spirit; yet our natures, being composed of flesh and spirit, may be assisted in worship by the harmony of the voice of him that speaks. Should the matter, method, and expressions be never so well chosen in prayer, yet it is possible for the voice to spoil the pleasure, and injure the devotion of our fellow worshippers. When speeches of the best composition, and the warmest language, are recited in a cold, harsh, or ungrateful way, the beauty of them is almost lost.

Some persons, by nature, have a very sweet and tuneable voice, that whatsoever they speak appears pleasing. Others must take much more pains, and attend with diligence to rules and directions, that their voice may be formed to an agreeable pronunciation; for we find, by sad experience, that all the advantages that nature can obtain or apply to assist our devotions, are all little enough to keep our hearts from wandering, and to maintain delight; at least it is a necessary duty to

know and avoid those disagreeable ways of pronunciation, that may rather disgust than edify such as join with us.

I confess, in secret prayer there is no necessity of a voice, for God hears a whisper as well as a sigh and a groan. Yet some Christians cannot pray with any advantage to themselves without the use of a voice in some degree; nor can I judge it all improper, but rather preferable, so that you have a convenient place for secrecy: for hereby you will not only excite your own affections the more, but by practice in secret, if you take due care of your voice there, you may learn also to speak in public the better.

The great and general rule I would lay down for managing the voice in prayer is this; ‘Let us use the same voice with which we usually speak in grave and serious conversation, especially upon pathetical and affecting subjects.’ This is the best direction that I know, to regulate the sound as well as the words. Our own native and common voice appears most natural, and may be managed with the greatest ease. And some persons have taken occasion to ridicule our worship, and to censure us as hypocrites, when we fondly seek and affect any new and different sort of sounds or voices in our prayers.

The particular *directions* are such as these:

Direction 1. ‘Let your words be all pronounced distinctly;’ and not made shorter by cutting off the

last syllable, nor longer by the addition of hems and O's, of long breaths, affected groanings, and useless sounds, of coughing or spitting, &c. which some have heretofore been guilty of, and have sufficiently disgraced religion.

If you cut off and lose the last syllable of your word, or mumble the last words of the sentence, and sink in your voice, so that others cannot hear, they will be ready to think, it is because you did not speak properly, and so were afraid to be heard.

If, on the other hand, you lengthen out your sentences with ridiculous sounds, you endanger the devotion even of the wisest and best of your fellow worshippers, and expose the worship to the profane railery of idle and corrupt fancies. While you seem to be designing to rub off the roughness of your throat, or to express greater affection by such methods, others will suspect that it is a method only to prolong your sentences, to stretch your prayer to an affected length, and to recover your thoughts what to say next. Therefore when your passions happen to be elevated with some lively expression in prayer, and you are delightfully constrained to dwell upon it; or when you meditate to speak the next sentence with propriety, it is far better to make a long pause, and keep a decent silence, than to fall into such indecencies of sound.

Direction 2. ' Let every sentence be spoken loud enough to be heard, yet none so loud as to affright.

‘or offend the ear.’ Between these two extremes there is a great variety of degrees in sound, sufficient to answer all the changes of our affections, and the different sense of every part of our prayer. In the beginning of prayer especially a lower voice is more becoming, both as it bespeaks humility and reverence, when we enter into the presence of God, and as it is also a great conveniency to the organs of speech not to rise too high at first; for it is much harder to sink again afterwards, than to rise to higher accents, if need require. Some persons have got a habit of beginning their prayers, and even upon the most common family occasions, so loud as to startle the company; others begin so low in a large assembly, that it looks like secret worship, and as though they forbid those that are present to join with them. Both these extremes are to be avoided by prudence and moderation.

Direction 3. ‘Observe a due medium between excessive swiftness and slowness of speech, for both are faulty in their kind.’ If you are too swift, your words will be hurried on, and will, as it were, intrude upon one another, and be mingled in confusion. It is necessary, therefore, to observe a due distance between your words, and a much greater distance between your sentences, that so all may be pronounced distinct and intelligible.

Due and proper pauses and stops will give the hearer time to conceive and reflect on what you speak, and

more heartily to join with you, as well as give you leave to breath, and make the work more easy and pleasant to yourselves. Besides, when persons run on heedlessly with an incessant flow of words, being carried as it were in a violent stream, without rests or pauses, they are in danger of uttering things rashly before God, giving no time at all to their own meditation, but indulging their tongue to run sometimes too fast for their own thoughts, as well as for the affections of such as are present with them. And hence it comes to pass, that some persons have begun a sentence in prayer, and been forced to break off and begin anew: Or if they have pursued that sentence, it has been with so much inconsistency, that it could hardly be reduced to sense or grammar, which has given too sensible an occasion to others to ridicule all conceived prayer, and has been very dishonorable to God and his worship. All this arises from a hurry of the tongue into the middle of a sentence, before the mind has conceived the full and complete sense of it.

On the other hand, if you are too slow, and very sensibly and remarkably so, this will also grow tiresome to the hearers, while they have done with the sentence you spoke last, and wait in pain, and long for the next expression, to exercise their thoughts, and carry on their devotion. This will make your worship appear heavy and dull: Yet I must needs say, that an error on this hand in prayer, is to be preferred before an excess of speed and hurry, and its consequences are less hurtful to religion.

In general, with the two foregoing directions, ‘Let the sense of each sentence be a rule to guide your voice, whether it must be high or low, swift or leisurely.’ In the invocation of God, in humble adoration, in confession of sin, and self-resignation, a slower and a modester voice is for the most part very becoming as well as in every other part of prayer where there is nothing very patheticall expressed. But in petitions, in pleadings, in thanksgivings and rejoicing in God, fervency and importunity, holy joy and triumph will raise the voice some degrees higher; and lively passions of the delightful kind, will naturally draw out our language with greater speed and spirit.

Direction 4. ‘Let proper accents be put according as the sense requires.’ It would be endless to give particular rules how to place our accents. Nature dictates this to every man, if he will but attend to the dictates of nature. Yet in order to attain it in greater perfection, and to secure us from irregularity in this point, let us avoid these few things following:

1. ‘Avoid a constant uniformity of voice;’ that is, when every word and sentence is spoken without any difference of sound; like a boy at school repeating all his lesson in one dull note, which shews that he is not truly acquainted with the sense and value of the author.—Now though persons may be truly sincere and devout, who speak without any difference of accent, yet such a pronunciation will appear to others as careless and negligent, as though the person that

speaks were unconcerned about the great work in which he is engaged, and as though he had none of his affections moved, whereby his voice might be modulated into agreeable changes.

2. ' Avoid a vicious disposition of the accents, and false pronunciation.' As for instance, it is a vicious pronunciation, when a person uses just the same set of accents, and repeats the same set of sounds and cadences in every sentence, though his sentences are ever so different as to the sense, as to the length, or as to the warmth of expression; as if a man should begin every sentence in prayer with a high voice, and end it in a low; or begin each line with a hoarse and deep bass, and end it with a shrill and sharp sound. This is as if a musician should have but one sort of tune, or one single set of notes, and repeat it over again in every line of a song, which could never be graceful.

Another instance of *false* pronunciation, is, when strong accents are put upon little words, and particles which bear no great force in the sentence. And some persons are so unhappy, that those little words *they* and *that*, and *of* and *by*, shall have the biggest force of the voice bestowed upon them; whilst the phrases and expressions of chief signification are spoken with a cold and low voice.

Another instance of *false* pronunciation is, when a calm, plain sentence, wherein there is nothing pathetic, is delivered with much force and violence of

speech; or when the most pathetic and affectionate expressions are spoken with the utmost calmness and composure of voice. All which are very unnatural in themselves, and to be avoided by those that would speak properly, to the edification of such as worship with them.

The last instance I shall mention of *false* pronunciation is, when we fall into a musical turn of voice, as though we were singing instead as praying. Some devout souls have been betrayed into such a self-pleasing tone, by the warmth of their spirits in secret worship: And having none to hear, and inform them how disagreeable it is to others, have indulged it even to an incurable habit.

3. 'Avoid a fond and excessive humoring every word and sentence to extremes, as if you were upon a stage in a theatre.' Which fault also some serious persons have fallen into for want of caution. And it hath appeared so like affectation, that it hath given great ground for censure: As for instance,

If we should express every humble and mournful sentence in a weeping tone, and with our voice personate a person that is actually crying; that is what our adversaries have exposed by the name of *canting* and *whining*, and have thrown it upon a whole party, for the sake of the imprudence of a few.

Another instance of this excessive affectation is, when we express every pleasurable sentence in our

prayers, every promise or comfort, every joy or hope, in too free and airy a manner, with too bold an exultation, or with a broad smile: Which indeed looks like too familiar a dealing with the great God. Every odd and unpleasing tone should be banished from divine worship: Nor should we appear before God in humility upon our knees, with grandeur and magnificence upon our tongue, lest the sound of our voice should contradict our gesture, lest it should favor of irreverence in so awful a presence, and give disgust to those that hear us.

S E C T. VII.

Of GESTURE in PRAYER.

V. **W**E proceed now to the fifth and last thing considerable in the gift of prayer; and that is *GESTURE*.

And though it may not so properly be termed a part of the gift, yet inasmuch as it belongs to the outward performance of this piece of worship, I cannot think it improper to treat a little of it in this place.

Since we are commanded to pray always, and at all seasons, there can be no posture of the body unfit for short ejaculations and pious breathings towards

God; while we lie in our beds, while we sit at our tables, or are taking our rest in any methods of refreshment, our souls may go out towards our heavenly Father, and have sweet converse with him in short prayers. And to this we must refer that passage, 1 Chron. xvii. 16. concerning David, where it is said, *He sat before the Lord, and said, Lord, who am I, or what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?* But when we draw near to God in special seasons of worship, the work of prayer calls for a greater solemnity, and in every thing that relates to it, we ought to compose ourselves with great reverence, that we may worship God with our bodies, as well as with our spirits, and pay him devotion with our whole natures, 1 Cor. vi. 20.

In our discourse concerning the *gestures* fit for worship, we shall consider, *first*, the posture of the whole body; and *secondly*, of the particular parts of it; and endeavor to secure you against indecencies in either of them.

1. Those *postures of the body*, which the light of nature and rule of scripture seem to dictate as most proper for prayer, are *standing, kneeling, or prostration*.

Prostration is sometimes used in secret prayer, when a person is under a deep and uncommon sense of sin, and falls flat upon his face before God, and pours out his soul before him, under the influence of such tho'ts, and the working of such graces as produce very un-

common expressions of humiliation and self-abasement. This we find in scripture made use of upon many occasions: As Abraham fell on his face before God, Gen. xvii. 3. and Joshua before the Lord Jesus Christ, the captain of the host of God, Josh. v. 14. So Moses, Ezekiel, and Daniel, at other seasons: So in the New Testament, when John fell at the feet of the angel to worship him, supposing it had been our Lord, Rev. xix. 10. And who could chuse but fall down to the dust at the presence of God himself?

Kneeling is the most frequent posture used in this worship, and nature seems to dictate and lead us to it as an expression of humility, of a sense of our wants, a supplication for mercy, and adoration of, and a dependence upon him before whom we kneel. This posture hath been practised in all ages, and in all nations, even where the light of scripture never shined: And if it might be had with conveniency, would certainly be a most agreeable posture for the worship of God in public assemblies, as well as in private families, or in our secret chambers. There are so many instances and directions for this posture in scripture, that it would be useless to take pains to prove it. So Solomon, 2 Chron. vi. 13. Ezra, Ezr. ix. 5. Daniel, Dan. vi. 10. Christ himself, Luke xxii. 41. Paul, Acts xx. 36. xxi. 5. Eph. iii. 14.

In the last place, *standing* is a posture not unfit for this worship, especially in places where we have not conveniency for the humbler gestures. For as stand-

ing up before a person whom we respect and reverence, is a token of that esteem and honor which we pay him; so standing before God, where we have not conveniences of kneeling, is an agreeable testification of our high esteem of him whom we then address and worship. There are instances of this gesture in the word of God. Mark xi. 25. our Saviour says to his disciples, *when ye stand praying*; and Luke xviii. 13. *The publican stood afar off and prayed. Standing* seems to have been the common gesture of worship in a large and public assembly, 2 Chron. xx. 4, 5, 13. And in this case it is very proper to conform to the usage of Christians with whom we worship, whether *standing* or *kneeling*, since neither of them are made absolutely necessary by the word of God.

But I cannot think that *sitting*, or other postures of rest and laziness, ought to be indulged in solemn seasons of prayer, unless persons are in any respect infirm or aged, or the work of prayer be drawn out so long as to make it troublesome to human nature to maintain itself always in one posture. And in these cases, whatsoever gesture of body keeps the mind in the best composure, and fits it most to proceed in this worship, will not only be accepted of God, but is most agreeable to him. For it is a great rule that he hath given, and he will always stand by, that *bodily exercise profiteth little*; for he looks chiefly after the heart, and *he will have mercy and not sacrifice*.

2. The posture of the *several parts of the body* that are most agreeable to worship, and that may secure

us from all indecencies, may be thus particularized and enumerated.

As for the *head*, let it be kept for the most part without motion, for there are very few turns of the head in the worship of prayer, that can be accounted decent. And many persons have exposed themselves to ridicule by tossings and shakings of the head, and nodding while they have been offering the solemn sacrifice of prayer to God. Though it must be allowed that in cases of great humiliation, the hanging down of the head, is no improper method to express that temper of mind. So the praying publican in the text aforecited: So the Jews, in the time of Ezra, in a full congregation, *bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces towards the ground*, Neh. viii. 6. But in our expressions of hope and joy, it is natural to lift up the head, while we believe that our redemption draws nigh; as in Luke xxi. 28. I might also mention the apostle's advice, that he that prays ought to have his head uncovered, lest he dishonor his head, 1 Cor. xi. 4.

In the face the God of Nature hath written various indications of the temper of the mind; and especially when it is moved by any warm affection.

In divine worship, the whole visage should be composed to gravity and solemnity, to express a holy awe and reverence of the majesty of God, and the high importance of the work wherein we are engaged.

In confession of sin, while we express the sorrows of our soul, melancholy will appear in our countenances; the dejection of the mind may be read there, and according to the language of scripture, *shame and confusion will cover our faces*. The humble sinner blushes before God at the remembrance of his guilt, Jer. li. 51. Ezra ix. 6. Fervency of spirit in our petitions, and holy joy when we give thanks to our God for his mercies, and rejoice in our highest hope, will be discovered by very agreeable and pleasing traces in the features and countenance.

But here let us take heed that we do not expose ourselves to the censure of our Saviour, who reprov- ed the pharisees for disfiguring their faces all that day which they set apart for *secret fasting and prayer*, Matt. vi. 16. While we are engaged in the very duty, some decent appearances of the devotion of the mind, in the countenance, are very natural and proper, and are not here forbidden by our Lord; but at the same time, it is best that those discoveries or characters of the countenance should fall below, and stay behind the inward affections of the mind, rather than rise too high, or than go before. The devotion of our hearts should be warmer and stronger than that of our faces, and we should have a care of all irregular and disagreeable distortions of the *face*: All those affected grimaces, and wringing of the countenance, as it were to squeeze out our words, or our tears, which sometimes may tempt our fellow-worshippers to disgust, when they behold us; as well as on the

other hand avoid yawning, and an air of listlessness, and drowfy gestures, which discover the sloth of the mind. It is a terrible word spoken by Jeremy, in another case, Jer. xlviii. 10. *Cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord negligently.*

To *lift up the eyes* to heaven is a very natural posture of prayer, and therefore the psalmist so often mentions it, Psal. cxxi. 1. and cxxiii. 1. and cxli. 8. Though sometimes under great dejection of spirit, and concern for sin, it is very decent, with the publican, to look down as it were upon the ground, as being unworthy to lift up our eyes to heaven, where God dwells, Luke xviii. 13.

But above all, a roving eye, that takes notice of every thing, ought to be avoided in prayer; for tho' it may be possible for a person that prays to keep his thoughts composed whilst his eyes thus wander, (which at the same time seems very difficult) yet spectators will be ready to judge that our hearts are given to wander, as much as our eyes are, and they will suspect that the life and spirit of devotion is absent. Upon this account some persons have found it most agreeable, to keep their eyes always closed in prayer, lest by the objects that occur to their sight the chain of their thoughts should be broken, or their hearts led away from God by their senses: Nor can I think it improper to shut that door of the senses, and exclude the world while we are conversing with God. But in this and other directions, I would always ex-

cuse such persons who lie under any natural weaknesses, and must use those methods that make the work of prayer most easy to them.

The *lifting up of the hands*, sometimes folded together, or sometimes apart, is a very natural expression of our seeking help from God, who dwells above, Psalm xxviii. 2. and cxxxiv. 2. The elevation of the eyes and the hands, is so much the dictate of nature in all acts of worship wherein we address God, that the heathens themselves frequently practised it, as we have an account in their several writers, as well as we find it mentioned as the practice of the saints in the holy scripture.

And as the elevation of the hands to heaven is a very natural gesture when a person prays for himself; so when a superior prays for a blessing to descend upon any person of an inferior character, it is very natural to *lay his hand upon the head of the person* for whom he prays. This we find practised from the beginning of the world, and the practice descends throughout all ages. It is true indeed, this gesture, the *imposition of hands*, was used by the prophets and apostles, when they pronounced authoritative and divine blessings upon men, and communicated miraculous gifts. But I esteem it not so much a peculiar rite belonging to the prophetic benediction, as it is a natural expression of a desire of the divine blessing from a father to a son, from an elder person to one that is younger, from a minister to other Christians, especi-

ally those that are babes in Christ; and therefore, when a person is set apart and devoted to God, in any solemn office, whilst prayers are made for a divine blessing to descend upon him, *imposition of hands* seems to be a gesture of nature; and, considered in itself, I cannot think it either unlawful or unnecessary.

With regard to other parts of the body, there is little need of any directions: *Calmness* and *quietness*, and an *uniformity of posture*, seems to be most decent. Almost all motions are disagreeable, especially such as carry with them any sound or noise; for hereby the worship is rather disturbed than promoted; and some persons by such actions, have seemed as though they beat time to the music of their own sentences.

In secret devotion indeed, *sighs*, and *groans*, and *weeping*, may be very well allowed, where we give vent to our warmest passions, and our whole nature and frame is moved with devout affections of the mind. But in public these things should be less indulged, unless in such extraordinary seasons, when all the assembly may be effectually convinced they arise deep from the heart. If we indulge ourselves in various motions, or noise made by the hands or feet, or any other parts, it will tempt others to think that our minds are not very intensely engaged, or at least it will appear so familiar and irreverent, as we would not willingly be guilty of in the presence of our superiors here on earth.

Of FAMILY PRAYER.

Since it is so necessary for the person that speaks in prayer to abstain from noisy motions, I hope all that join with him will understand that it is very unseemly for them to disturb the worship with motion and noise. How indecent is it at FAMILY PRAYER, for persons to spend a good part of the time, in settling themselves upon their knees, adjusting their dress, moving their chairs, saluting those that pass by and come in, after the worship is begun ! How unbecoming is it to stir and rise, while the two or three last sentences are spoken, as though devotion were so unpleasant and tedious a thing, that they longed to have it over ! How often is it found that the knee is the only part that pays external reverence to God, while all the other parts of the body are composed to laziness, ease, and negligence ! Some there are that seldom come in till the prayer is begun, and then there is a bustle, and disturbance made for their accommodation. To prevent some of these irregularities, I would persuade him that prays, not to begin till all that design to join in the family worship are present, and that even before the chapter is read ; for I would not have the word of God used in a family for no other purpose than the tolling of a bell at church, to tell that the people are coming in to prayers.

Of GRACE before and after MEAT.

Since I have spoken so particularly about family prayer, I would insert a word or two concerning a-

nother part of social worship in a family, and that is, *giving thanks before and after meat*: Herein we ought to have a due regard to the occasion, and the persons present; the neglect of which, hath been attended with indecencies and indiscretion.

Some have used themselves to mutter a few words with so low a voice, as though by some secret charm they were to consecrate the food alone, and there was no need of the rest to join with them in the petitions. Others have broke out into so violent a sound, as tho' they were bound to make a thousand people hear them.

Some perform this part of worship with so slight and familiar an air, as though they had no sense of the great God to whom they speak: Others have put on an unnatural solemnity, and changed their natural voice into so different and aukward a tone, not without some distortions of countenance, that hath tempted strangers to ridicule it.

It is the custom of some, to hurry over a single sentence or two, and they have done before half the company are prepared to lift up a thought to heaven.— And some have been just heard to bespeak a blessing on the church and the king, but seem to have forgot they were asking God to bless their food, or giving thanks for the food they had received. Others again have given themselves a loose into a long prayer, and among a multitude of other petitions, have not had one that related to the table before them.

The general rules of prudence, together with a due observation of the custom of the place where we live, would correct all these disorders, and teach us, that a few sentences suited to the occasion, spoken with an audible and proper voice, are sufficient for this purpose, especially if any strangers are present. If we are abroad in mixed company, many times it is best for each person to lift up a petition to God in secret for himself; yet in a religious family, or where all the company are of a piece, and no other circumstance forbids it, I cannot disapprove of a pious soul sometimes breathing out a few more devout expressions than are just necessary to give thanks for the food we receive; nor is it improper to join any other present occurrence of Providence together with the table-worship.

Here I would also beg leave to add this, that when a person is eating alone, I do not see any necessity of rising always from his seat, to recommend his food to the blessing of God, which may be done in any posture of body with a short ejaculation; yet when he eats in company, I am of opinion that the present custom of standing up, is more decent and honorable than of sitting down just before we give thanks, which was too much practised in the former age.

Thus I have delivered my sentiments concerning the *gestures proper for prayer*, and I hope they will appear useful and proper to maintain the dignity of the worship, and to pay honor to God with our bo-

dies, as well as our souls. As we must not make ourselves mere statues and lifeless engines in prayer, so neither must we, out of pretence of spirituality, neglect all decencies. Our forms of religion are not numerous nor gaudy as the Jewish rites, nor theatrical gestures or superstitious fopperies like the papists; we have no need to be masters of ceremonies in order to worship God aright, if we will but attend to the simplicity of manners which nature dictates, and the precepts and examples of the gospel confirm.

Remark. Tho' the gestures that belong to preaching are very different from those of prayer, yet most of the rules that are prescribed for the expression and the voice in prayer, may be usefully applied also to preaching; but this difference is to be observed, that in the work of preaching, the same restraints are not always necessary, and especially in applying truth warmly to the conscience; for then we speak to men in the name and authority of God, and we may indulge a greater freedom and brightness of language, more lively motions, and bolder efforts of zeal and outward fervor: But in prayer, where, in the name of sinful creatures, we address the great and holy God, every thing that belongs to us must be composed to an appearance of humility.

S E C T. VIII.

General DIRECTIONS about the GIFT of PRAYER.

THUS have I finished what I designed upon the gift of prayer with regard to the *matter*, the *method*, the *expression*, the *voice*, and the *gesture*.—I shall conclude this chapter with these *five general directions*:

I. ‘Keep the middle way between a nice and laborious attendance to all the rules I have given, and a careless neglect of them.’ As every rule seems to carry its own reason with it, so it is proper that there should be some regard had to it, when occasions for the practice occur; for I have endeavored to say nothing on this subject but what might some way or other be useful towards the attainment of an agreeable gift of prayer, and the decent exercise of that gift.—The multiplicity of our wants, the unfaithfulness of our memories, the dullness and slowness of our apprehensions, the common wanderings of our thoughts, and the coldness of our affections, will require our best care for the remedy of them.

Yet, on the other hand, I would not have you confine yourselves too precisely to all these forms in matter, method, expression, voice, and gesture, upon every occasion, lest you feel yourselves thereby under

some restraint, and deprive your souls of that divine liberty, with which, upon special occasions, the Spirit of God blesses his own people in the performance of this duty. When the heart is full of good matter, the tongue will sometimes be *as the pen of a ready writer*. Psal. xlv. 1. Such a fixedness and fulness of tho't, such a fervor of pious affections, will sometimes produce so glorious a fluency and variety of pertinent and moving expressions, and all in so just a method, as makes it appear the man is carried beyond himself, and would be straitened and cramped by a careful attendance to rules.

See then that the graces of prayer are at work in your souls with power; let this be your first and highest care; and by a sweet influence this will lead you to a natural and easy performance of this duty, according to most of the particular rules I have given, even without a nice and exact attendance to them. So without attendance to the rules of art, a man may sometimes, in a very musical humor, strike out some inimitable graces and flourishes, and charm all that hear him.

2. 'Among ministers, and among your fellow Christians, observe those that have the most edifying gifts;' and with regard to the matter, method, expression, voice, and gesture, endeavor to imitate them who are most universally approved of, and the exercise of whose talents are most abundantly blest to excite and maintain the devotion of their fellow worshippers.—

And at the same time also take notice of all the irregularities and indecencies that any persons are guilty of in this worship, in order to avoid them when you pray.

3. 'Use all proper means to obtain a manly presence of mind, and holy courage in religious performances.' Though excess of bashfulness be a natural infirmity, yet if indulged in such affairs, it may become very culpable. There have been many useful gifts buried in silence, through a sinful bashfulness in the person endowed with them; and generally all persons, when they first begin to pray in public, feel something of this weakness, for want of a due presence of mind; and it hath had different effects. Some persons have lost that due calmness and temper which should govern their expressions, and have been driven on to the end of their prayer like a school-boy hurrying his lesson over, or a larum set a running, that could not stop till it was quite down. Others have hesitated at every sentence, and, it may be, felt a stop in their speech, that they could utter no more. Others again, whose minds have been well furnished and prepared, have lost their own scheme of thoughts, and made poor work at first, through mere bashfulness.

I grant, that courage and a degree of assurance is a natural talent; but it may also, in a great measure, be acquired by the use of proper means: I will here mention a few of them.

(1.) Get above the shame of appearing religious, that you may be dead to the reproaches of a wicked world, and despise the jests and scandal that are cast upon strict godliness.

(2.) Make religious conversation your practice and delight. If you are but inured to speak to men concerning the things of God without blushing, you will be enabled to speak to God in the presence of men with holy confidence.

(3.) Labor to attain this gift of prayer in a tolerable degree, and exercise it often in secret for some considerable time before you begin in public.

(4.) Take heed that your heart be always well prepared, and let the matter of your prayer be well premeditated when you make your first public attempts in it.

(5.) Strive to maintain upon your soul a much greater awe of the majesty of that God to whom you speak, than of the opinions of those fellow creatures with whom you worship, that so you may, as it were, forget you are in the company of men, while you address the most high God. Chide your heart into courage, when you find it shy and sinking, and say, "Dare I speak to the great and dreadful God, and shall I be afraid of man?"

Now in order to practise this advice well, the next shall be akin to it.

(6.) Be not too tender of your own reputation in the externals of religion. This softness of spirit which we call *bashfulness*, has often a great deal of fondness of *self* mingled with it. When we are to speak in public, this enfeebles the mind, throws us into a hurry, and makes us perform much worse than we do in secret. When we are satisfied therefore that we are engaged in present duty to God, let us maintain a noble negligence of the censures of men, and speak with the same courage as though none but God were present.

Yet to administer farther relief under this weakness, I add,

(7.) Make your first essays in the company of one or two, either of your inferiors, or your most intimate, most pious, and candid acquaintance, that you may be under no fear nor concern about their sentiments or your performance. Or join yourself in society with some young Christians of equal standing, and set apart times for praying together, which is an excellent way to obtain the gift of prayer.

(8.) Do not aim at length in prayer, in your younger attempts, but rather be short; offer up a few more common and necessary requests at first, and proceed by degrees to enlarge and fulfil the several parts of this worship, as farther occasion shall offer, and as your gifts and courage encrease.

(9.) Be not discouraged if your first experiments be not so successful as you desire. Many a Christian has in time arrived at a glorious gift in prayer, who in their younger essays have been overwhelmed with bashfulness and confusion. Let not Satan prevail with you therefore to cast off this practice and your hope, at once, by such a temptation as this.

(10.) Make it the matter of your earnest requests to God, that you may be endowed with Christian courage, with a holy liberty of speech, and freedom of utterance, which the blessed apostle, Paul, often prays for: And you have reason to hope, that he that gives *every good and perfect gift*, will not deny you that which is so necessary to the performance of your duty.

I proceed now to the *fourth* general direction.

IV. ‘Intreat the assistance of some kind Christian friend, to give you notice of all the irregularities, that yourself have been guilty of in prayer, especially in your first years of the practice of this duty;’ and esteem those the most valuable of your friends, who will put themselves to the trouble of giving you a modest and an obliging hint of any of your own imperfections: For it is not possible that we ourselves should judge of the tone of our own voice, or the gestures that we ourselves use, whether they be agreeable to our fellow-worshippers or no. And in other

instances also, our friends may form a more unbiased judgment than ourselves, and therefore are fittest to be our correctors.

For want of this, some persons in their youth have gained so ill a habit of speaking in public, and so many disorders have attended their exercise of the gift of prayer—*ill tones, vicious accents, wild distortions of the countenance, and divers other improprieties*, which they carried with them all the years of their life, and have oftentimes exposed the worship of God to contempt, and hindred the edification of those that joined with them, rather than promoted it.

V. ‘Be frequent in the practice of this duty of prayer, not only in secret, but with one another.’ For though every rule that I have before given, were fixed in your memories, and always at hand, yet without frequent practice you will never attain to any great skill and readiness in this holy exercise.

As our *graces* themselves, by being often tried and put upon action, become stronger, and shine brighter, give God more glory, and do more service to men; so will it fare with every gift of the Holy Spirit also; it is improved by frequent exercise. Therefore, the apostle bids the young evangelist, Timothy, that he should *not neglect to stir up the gift that was in him*, though it was a gift communicated in an extraordinary way, by the imposition of hands, 2 Tim. i. 6. And therefore it is, that some serious Christians that

have less knowledge, will excel persons of great learning, and wit, and judgment, in the gift of prayer; because, though they do not understand the rules so well, yet they practise abundantly more. And for the most part, if all other circumstances are equal, it will be found a general truth, that *he that prays most, prays best.*

C H A P. III.

Of the GRACE of PRAYER.

IN the two first chapters, I have finished what I proposed concerning the external parts of prayer; I proceed now to take a short view of the internal and spiritual part of that duty; and this has been usually called the *GRACE of PRAYER.*

Here I shall endeavor to explain what it means, and show how properly that term is used: Afterward I shall particularly mention what are those inward and spiritual exercises of the mind, which are required in the duty of prayer, and then give directions how to attain them. But in the most part of this chapter I shall pass over things with much brevity, because it is not my design in writing this book, to say over again what so many practical writers have said on these subjects.

S E C T. I.

What the GRACE of PRAYER is, and how it differs from the GIFT.

GRACE, in its most general sense, implies the free and undeserved favor of one person toward another that is esteemed his inferior: And in the language of the New Testament, it is usually put to signify the favor and mercy of God toward sinful creatures, which upon all accounts is acknowledged to be free and undeserved. Now because our natures are corrupt and averse to what is good, and whenever they are changed, and inclined to God and divine things; this is done by the power of God working in us: Therefore, this very change of nature, this renewed and divine frame of mind, is called in the common language of Christians, by the name of *grace*.

If I were to write my thoughts of the distinction between the terms of *virtue*, *holiness*, and *grace*, I should give them thus:

Virtue generally signifies the mere material part of that which is good, without a particular reference to God, as the principle or end thereof: Therefore, the good dispositions and actions of the Heathens were called *Virtues*. And this word also is applied to sobriety, chastity, righteousness, and every thing that

relates to ourselves and our neighbors, rather than to religion and things that relate to divine worship.

Holiness signifies all these good dispositions and actions, with their particular reference to God as their end, to whose glory they are devoted and performed. The word *holy*, signifies that which is devoted or dedicated.

Grace denotes the same dispositions, with a peculiar regard to God as their principle, intimating that they proceed from his favor.

Sometimes this word is used in a comprehensive sense, to signify the whole train of Christian virtues, or the universal habit of holiness. So may those texts be understood, John i. 16. *Of his fulness we have received grace.* 2 Pet. iii. 18. *Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And so in our common language we say, such a person is a *graceless* wretch, he has no *grace* at all, that is, no good dispositions. We say such an one is truly *gracious*, or he has a principle of *grace*, that is, he is a man of religion and virtue.

Sometimes it is used in its singular sense, and means any one inclination or holy principle in the mind. So we say, *the grace of faith, the grace of repentance, the grace of hope, or love.* So 2 Cor. viii. 7. *Therefore, as ye abound in faith, in knowledge, in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also, that is, liberality.*

Sometimes it is used in a sense a little more enlarged, but not universal, and it implies all those pious qualifications that belong to any one action or duty; so we read of the grace that belongs to conversation, Col. iv. 6. *Let your speech be always with grace*; the grace of singing, Col. iii. 16. *Singing with grace in your hearts*; and the grace of divine worship seems to be maintained, Heb. xii. 28. *Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence, &c.* and the grace of prayer, Zech. xii. 13. *I will pour on the house of David the Spirit of grace and supplication.*

‘The GRACE of PRAYER, in our common acceptation, is not any *one* single act or habit of mind, but it implies *all* those holy dispositions of soul which are to be exercised in that part of divine worship.’ It consists in a readiness to put forth those several acts of the sanctified mind, will and affections, which are suited to the duty of prayer.

Hence will appear the great difference that is betwixt the *gift* and *grace* of prayer. The *gift* is but the outside, the shape, the carcase of the duty. The *grace* is the soul and spirit, that gives it life, and vigor, and efficacy, that renders it acceptable to God, and of real advantage to ourselves.

The *gift* chiefly consists in a readiness of thought, agreeable to the several parts of prayer, and a faculty of expressing those thoughts in speaking to God. The

grace consists merely in the inward working of the heart and conscience toward God and religion. The *gift* has a shew and appearance of holy desires and affections; but holy affections, sincere desires, and real converse with God, belong only to the *grace of prayer*.

The *gift* and the *grace* are many time separated one from the other, and it hath been often found that the *gift of prayer* hath been attained in a great degree by study and practice, and by the common workings of the Spirit of God communicated to some persons that have known nothing of true grace. There may be also the *grace of prayer* in lively exercise in some souls, that have but a very small degree of this *gift*, and that hardly know how to form their thoughts and desires into a regular method, or to express those desires in tolerable language.

Concerning some persons it may be said, as in Mat. vii. 22. that though they could pour out abundance of words before God in prayer, though they could preach like apostles, or like angels, or *cast out devils in the name of Christ*, yet our Lord Jesus *knows them not*, for they have no grace. On the other hand, there are some that are dear to God, that can but *chatter and cry like a swallow or a crane*, as Hezekiah did, and yet are in the lively exercise of the grace of prayer. But where both these, the *gift* and the *grace*, meet together in one person, such a Christian brings honor to God, and has a greater capacity and prospect of doing much service for souls in the world;

he is made of great use to the edification and comfort of his fellow-Christians.

Those acts of the sanctified soul in all its powers, which are put forth in the duty of prayer, may be properly called so many graces of the Holy Spirit, drawn forth in to exercise. And of these some belong to the whole work and worship of prayer, and others are peculiar to the several parts of the duty.

S E C T. II.

General GRACES of PRAYER.

THE *graces* that belong to the whole work or duty of prayer, are such as these:

I. 'Faith or belief of the being of God, and his perfect knowledge, and his gracious notice of all that we speak in prayer.' This rule the apostle gives, Heb. xi. 6. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of all that diligently seek him.* We should endeavor to impress our minds frequently with a fresh and lively belief of God's existence, though he be so much unknown; of his presence, though he be invisible; of his just and merciful regard to all the actions of men, and especially their religious affairs; that so prayer may not

be a matter of custom and ceremony, but performed with a design and hope of pleasing God, and getting some good from him. This exercise of a lively *faith* runs through every part of the duty, and gives spirit and power to the whole worship.

II. 'Gravity, solemnity, and seriousness of spirit.'

Let a light and trivial temper be utterly banished, when we come into the presence of God. When we speak to the great Creator (who must also be our judge) about concerns of infinite and everlasting moment, we ought to have our souls cloathed with solemnity, and not to assume those airs which are lawful at other seasons, when we talk with our fellow-creatures about meaner affairs. A wantonness and vanity of mind ought never to be indulged in the least degree, when we come to perform any part of divine worship; and especially when we, who are but dust and ashes, speak unto the great and dreadful God.

III. 'Spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, should run through the whole of this duty:' For prayer is a retirement from earth, and retreat from our fellow-creatures to attend on God, and hold correspondence with him that dwells in heaven. If our thoughts are full of corn, and wine, and oil, and the business of this life, we shall not seek so earnestly the favor and face of God, as becomes devout worshippers. The things of the world, therefore, must be commanded to stand by for a season, and to abide at the foot of the mount,

while we walk up higher to offer up our sacrifices, as Abraham did, and to meet our God. Our aims, and ends, and desires should grow more spiritual, as we proceed in this duty. And though God indulges us to converse with him about many of our temporal affairs in prayer, yet let us take care that the things of our souls, and the eternal world, always possess the chief room in our hearts. And whatsoever of the cares of this life enter into our prayers, and are spread before the Lord, let us see that our aims therein are spiritual, that our very desires of earthly comforts may be purified from all carnal ends, and sanctified to some divine purposes, to the glory of God, to the honor of the gospel, and the salvation of our souls.

IV. ‘Sincerity and uprightness of heart, is another grace that must run through this worship.’ Whether we speak to God concerning his own glories, whether we give him thanks for his abundant goodness, or confess our various iniquities before him, or express our desires of mercy at his hand; still let our hearts and our lips agree, and not be found mockers of God, who searches the hearts and tries the reins, and can spy hypocrisy in the darkest corners of the soul.

V. ‘Holy watchfulness, and intention of mind upon the duty in which we are engaged; this must run through every part of prayer.’ Our thoughts must not be suffered to wander among the creatures, and rove to the ends of the earth, when we come to con-

verse with the high and holy God. Without this holy watchfulness we shall be in danger of leaving God in the midst of the worship, because the temptations that arise from Satan, and from our own hearts, are various and strong. Without this watchfulness our worship will degenerate into formality, and we shall find coldness and indifference creeping upon our spirits, and spoiling the success of our duties. *Watch unto prayer*, is a constant direction of the great apostle.

I might add to these, *humility* and *delight* or *pleasure*, and other exercises of the sanctified affections; but I shall have occasion more properly to mention them under the next head.

S E C T. III.

GRACES *that belong to particular parts of PRAYER.*

THE *graces* that particularly belong to the several parts of prayer, are distinguished according to the parts of this duty; namely,

I. *Invocation*, or calling upon God, requires a special awe of his Majesty to attend it, and a deep sense of our own meanness and unworthiness; and at the same time we should express holy wonder and plea-

sure, that the most high God, who inhabits eternity, will suffer such contemptible and worthless beings as we are, to hold correspondence with him.

II. The work of *adoration* or *praise* runs through the several attributes of the divine nature, and requires of us the exercise of our various affections suited to those several attributes. As when we mention God's self-sufficiency and independency, it becomes us to be humble and acknowledge our dependence: When we speak of his power and of his wisdom, we should abase ourselves before him, because of our weakness and folly, as well as stand in holy admiration at the infinity of those glories of God. When we mention his love and compassion, our souls should return much love to him again, and have our affections going forth strongly towards him. When we think of his justice, we should have a holy awe upon our spirits, and a religious fear, suited to the presence of the just and dreadful God. And the thought of his forgiveness should awaken us to hope and joy.

III. In the *confession* of our sorrows and our sins, *humility* is a necessary grace, and *deep contrition of soul*, in the presence of that God whose laws we have broken, whose gospel we have abused, whose majesty we have affronted, and whose vengeance we have deserved. Here all the springs of repentance should be set open, and we should mourn for sin, even at the same time we hope that iniquity is forgiven, and our souls are reconciled to God. *Shame* and *self-indig-*

nation, and *holy revenge* against the corruptions of our hearts, should be awakened also in this part of prayer.

IV. In our *petitions* we should raise our desires to such different degrees of fervency, as the nature of our requests makes necessary. When we pray for the things of the upper world, and eternal blessings, we cannot be too warm in our desires: When we seek the mercies of life, the degree of fervency should be abated, for it is possible that we may be happy, and yet go without many of the comforts of the present state: *Submission* is here required; and God expects to see his children thus rationally religious, and wisely to divide the things that are most agreeable to his will, and most necessary for our felicity.

While we make intercession for our friends, or our enemies, we ought to feel in ourselves warm and lively compassion; and when we pray for the church of Christ in the world, we should animate all our expressions with a burning zeal for his glory, and tenderness for our fellow-Christians.

V. *Pleading* with God, calls for *humble importunity*: For the arguments that we use with God, in pleading with him, are but the various forms of importunate request. But because we are but creatures, and we speak to God, *humility* ought to mingle with every one of our arguments. Our pleadings with him should be so expressed, as always to carry with them

that decency, and that distance that becomes creatures, in the presence of their Maker. In pleadings also we are required to exercise *faith in the promises* of the gospel, *faith in the name of Christ Jesus*, our mediator, *faith in the mercies of our God*, according to the discoveries he hath made of himself in this world. We are called to believe that he is a God hearing prayer, and will bestow upon us what we seek, so far as is necessary for his glory and our salvation: To believe *that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, Heb. xi. 6. Here also the grace of *hope* comes into exercise; for while we trust the promises, we hope for the things promised, or the things for which we petition. We ought to maintain an humble holy expectation, of those mercies for which we plead with God. We must *direct our prayer to him*, and look up with David, Psal. v. 3. and with Habakkuk, *stand upon our watch-tower, and see what he will answer us*, Hab. ii. 1.

VI. In that part of the prayer which is called *profession*, or *self-resignation*, great *humility* is again required; a sweet submission to his will, a composedness and quietness of spirit under his determination, even though, for reasons of infinite wisdom and love, he withhold from us the particular comforts that we seek. Here let *patience* have its perfect exercise, and let the soul continue in an humble frame, waiting upon God. While we give up ourselves to God, a divine steadiness of soul should attend it, and the firmest courage of heart against all oppositions, while we confirm all our self-dedications to the Lord,

VII. In *thanksgiving* a most hearty *gratitude* of soul is required, a deep sense of divine favors, and a readiness to return unto God, according to his goodness, to the utmost of our capacities; a growing love to God, and sincere longing to do something for him, answerable to the variety and riches of his grace towards us. Here also, with holy wonder, we acknowledge the condescension of God to bestow mercies upon us, so unworthy; and this wonder should arise and grow up into divine joy, while we bless our Maker for the mercies of this life, and our Father for an interest in his covenant, and his special love. And in our *thanksgivings* we should be sure to take notice of all returns of prayer, all merciful appearances of God in answer to our requests; for it is but a poor converse maintained with God, if we are only careful about our speaking to him, but take no notice of any replies he condescends to make to our poor and worthless addresses.

VIII. 'When we *bless* God, we should shew an *earnest longing* after the honor of the name of God,' and our souls should breathe fervently after the accomplishment of those promises wherein he hath engaged to spread his own honors, and to magnify his own name and the name of his Son; we should, as it were, exult and triumph in those glories, which God, our God, possesses, and rejoice to think that he shall forever possess them.

Then we *conclude* the whole prayer with our *Amen* of sincerity and of faith, in one short word expressing

over again our adorations, our confessions, and our petitions; trusting and hoping for the audience of our prayers, and acceptance of our persons; from whence we should take encouragement to rise from this duty with a sweet serenity and composure of mind, and maintain a joyful and heavenly frame, as those that have been with God.

But lest some pious and humble souls should be discouraged, when they find not these lively exercises of faith, hope, love, fervency of desire, and divine delight in worship, and thence conclude that they have not the *grace of prayer*; I would add this *caution*, namely, that all the graces of prayer are seldom at work in the soul at once, in an eminent and sensible degree; sometimes one prevails more, and sometimes another, in this feeble and imperfect state: And when a Christian comes before God with much deadness of heart, much overcome with carnal thoughts, and feels great reluctancy, even to the duty of prayer, and falls down before God mourning, complaining, self-condemning, and with sighs and deep groans, in secret makes known his burden and his sins to God, though he can speak but few words before him; such a frame and temper of mind, will be approved of by that God who judges the secrets of the heart, and makes most compassionate allowances for the infirmity of our flesh, and will acknowledge his own grace working in that soul, though it be but just breathing and struggling upwards through loads of sin and sorrow.

S E C T. IV.

Directions to attain the GRACE of PRAYER.

IN order to direct us in the spiritual performance of this duty, we must consider it as a holy converse maintained between earth and heaven, betwixt the great and holy God, and mean sinful creatures. Now the most natural rules that I can think of, to carry on this converse, are such as these:

Direction 1. 'Possess your hearts with a most affecting sense of the characters of the two parties that are to maintain this correspondence; that is, God and yourselves.' This indeed is one direction for the gift of prayer but it is also necessary to attain the grace. Let us consider who this glorious being is, that invites us to this fellowship with himself; how awful in majesty! how terrible in righteousness! how irresistible in power! how unsearchable in wisdom! how all-sufficient in blessedness! how condescending in mercy! Let us again consider, who are we that are invited to this correspondence: How vile in our original! how guilty in our hearts and lives! how needy of every blessing! how utterly incapable to help ourselves! and how miserable for ever, if we are without God!

And if we have sincerely obeyed the call of his gospel, and have attained to some comfortable hope

of his love; let us consider, how infinite are our obligations to him, and how necessary, and how delightful it is to enjoy his visits here, with whom it will be our happiness to dwell for ever. When we feel our spirits deeply impressed with such thoughts as these are, we are in the best frame, and most likely way to pray with grace in our hearts.

Direction 2. ‘When you come before God, remember the nature of this correspondence, it is all spiritual; remember the dignity and privilege, the design and the importance of it.’

A sense of the high favor, in being admitted to this *privilege* and *honor* will fill your souls with humble wonder, and with heavenly joy, such as becomes the favorites and worshippers of an infinite God. A due attendance to the *design* and *importance* of this duty, will fix your thoughts to the most immovable attention, and strict watchfulness; it will overspread your spirit with seriousness, it will command all your inward powers to devotion, and will raise your desires to holy fervency. You pray to him that hath power to save and to destroy, about your eternal destruction, or eternal salvation; and if eternity, with all its awful attendants, will not awaken some of the graces of prayer, the soul must be in a very stupid frame.

Direction 3. ‘Seek earnestly a state of friendship with him whom you converse with, and labor after a good hope and assurance of that friendship.’ We

are all *by nature enemies to God*, and *children of wrath*, Rom. viii. 7. and Ephes. ii. 2. If we are not reconciled, we can never hold communion with him. How can we delight in converse with an enemy so almighty? Or pay him due worship, while we believe he hates, and will destroy us? But O! how unspeakable is the pleasure in holding converse with so infinite, so almighty, and so compassionate a friend! and how ready will all the powers of nature be to render every honor to him, while we feel and know ourselves to be his favorites, and children of his grace? While we believe that all his honors are our glory, in this state of friendship; and each of his perfections are pillars of our hope, and the assurance of our happiness?

Now, in order to obtain this friendship, and to promote this divine fellowship, I recommend you to the next direction.

Direction 4. ‘Live much upon, and with Jesus, the Mediator, by whose interest alone you can come near God, and be brought into his company.’ Christ is the way, the truth, and the life: And no man comes to the Father but by him, John xiv. 6. Through him, Jews and Gentiles have access unto the Father, Ephes. ii. 11. Live much upon him therefore by trust and dependence, and live much with him by meditation and love.

When a sinner under first conviction sees with horror the dreadful holiness of God, and his own guilt

and desert of damnation, how fearful is he to draw near to God in prayer ! And how much discouraged while he abides without hope ! But when he first beholds Christ in his mediatorial offices, and his glorious all-sufficiency to save ; when he first beholds this new and living way of access to God, consecrated by the blood of Christ ; how cheefully doth he come before the throne of God, and pour out his whole soul in prayer ! And how lively is his nature in the exercise of every grace suited to his duty ! How deep his humility ! How fervent his desires ! How importunate his pleadings ! How warm and hearty are his thanksgivings !

And we have need always to maintain upon our spirits a deep sense of the evil of sin, of our desert of death, of the dreadful holiness of God, and impossibility of our converse with him without a mediator ; that so the name of Jesus may be ever precious to us, and that we may never venture into the presence of God in set and solemn prayer, without turning the eye of our soul to Christ our glorious introducer.

Direction 5. ‘ Maintain always a praying frame ;
‘ a temper of mind ready to converse with God.’
This will be one way to keep all praying graces ever ready for exercise. Visit him therefore often, and upon all occasions, with whom you would obtain some immediate communion at solemn seasons of devotion, and make the work of prayer your delight, nor rest satisfied till you find pleasure in it.

What advantages and opportunities soever you enjoy for social prayer, do not neglect praying in secret; at least once a day constrain the business of life to give you leave to say something to God alone.

When you join with others in prayer, where you are not the speaker, let your heart be kept intent and watchful to the work, that you may pray so much the better when you are the mouth of others to God.

Take frequent occasions, in the midst of your duties in the world, to lift up your heart to God: He is ready to hear a sudden sentence, and will answer the breathings of a holy soul towards himself in the short intervals or spaces betwixt your daily affairs. Thus you may *pray without ceasing*, as the apostle directs, and your graces may be ever lively; whereas, if you only make your addresses to God in the morning and evening, and forget him all the day, your hearts will grow indifferent in worship, and you will only pay a salutation with your lips and your knees, and fulfil the task with dull formality.

Direction 6. ‘Seek earnestly the assistance of the *‘Holy Spirit.’* It is he that works every grace in us, and fits us for every duty; it is he that awakens sleeping graces into exercise; it is he that draws the soul near to God, and teaches us this correspondence with heaven. He is the Spirit of grace and supplication; but because this is the subject of the following chapter, I shall pursue it no further here.

C H A P. IV.

Of the SPIRIT of PRAYER.

ALL the rules and directions that have hitherto been laid down, in order to teach us to pray, will be ineffectual, if we have no divine aids : *We are not sufficient of ourselves to think one good thought :* All that is good comes from God. If therefore we would attain the gift or grace of prayer, we must seek both from heaven ; and since the mercies of God, of this kind, that are bestowed on men, are usually attributed to the Holy Spirit, he may very properly be called the *Spirit of prayer* ; and as such, his assistance is to be sought with diligence and importunity.

I confess the *spirit of prayer*, in our language, may sometimes signify a temper of mind well furnished and ready for the work of prayer : So when we say, ‘ there was a greater SPIRIT of PRAYER found in churches in former days than now ; ’ we mean that there was a greater degree of the *gift* and *grace* of prayer found amongst men ; their hearts and their tongues were better furnished and fitted for this duty. But to deny the *Spirit of prayer* in all other senses, and declare there is no need of any influences from the Holy Spirit to assist us to pray, carries in it a high degree of self-sufficiency, and borders upon profaneness.

My business, therefore, in this chapter, shall be to prove, by plain and easy arguments, that the Spirit of God doth assist his people in prayer: Then to shew what his assistances are, and how far they extend, that we may not expect more from him than scripture promises, nor attribute too little to his influences: And after a few cautions laid down, I shall proceed to give some directions how the aids of the Holy Spirit may be obtained.

S E C T. I.

Proofs of the assistance of the SPIRIT of GOD in PRAYER.

THE methods of proof which I shall use to evince the influence of the Spirit of God in prayer, are these three: (1.) Express texts of scripture. (2.) Collateral texts. (3.) The experience of Christians.

I. The *first* argument is drawn from such *express texts of scripture* as these:

1st Text. Zech. xii, 10. *I will pour out on the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a Spirit of grace and of supplications.* Here the Holy Spirit of God is called a Spirit of supplications, with respect

to the special operations and ends for which he is here promised. The plentiful communication of his operations to men, is often expressed by pouring him out upon them, as Isai. xlv. 3. Prov. i. 23. Tit. iii. 6. and many other places. Now that this prophecy refers to the times of the gospel is evident, because the effect of it is a looking to Christ as pierced or crucified. *They shall look on him whom they have pierced.*

Objection. Some will say, this promise only refers to the Jews, at the time of their conversion.

Answer. Most of these exceeding great and precious promises, that relate to gospel times, are made expressly to Jacob, and Israel, and Jerusalem, and Sion, in the language of the Old Testament; and how dreadfully should we deprive ourselves, and all the Gentile believers, of all these gracious promises at one stroke, by such a confined exposition? Whereas the apostle Paul sometimes takes occasion to quote a promise of the Old Testament made to the Jews, and applies it to the Gentiles, as 2 Cor. vi. 16—18. *I will dwell with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people;* which is written for the Jews, in Levit. xxvi. 12. *Come out from among them—touch no unclean thing, and I will be a Father to you; &c.* which are cited from Isa. lii. 11. and Jer. xxxi. 1. 9: where Israel alone is mentioned. And yet in 2 Cor. vii. 1. the apostle says, *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves, &c.* And thus he makes the Co-

rinthians, as it were, possessors of these very promises. He gives us also much encouragement to do the same, when he tells us, Rom. xv. 4. *Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope:* And ver. 8, 9. he assures us, that *Jesus Christ confirms the promises made to the fathers, that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.* Again, in 2 Cor. i. 20. *All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, to the glory of God.* Now it would have been to very little purpose to have told the Romans, or the Corinthians, of the stability of all the promises of God, if their faith might not have embraced them.

We are said to be *blessed with faithful Abraham*, if we are imitators of his faith, Gal. iii. 29. *If we are Christ's then we are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise:* Heirs by faith of the same blessings that are promised to Abraham, and to his seed. Rom. iv. 13. Now this very promise, the promise of the Spirit, is received by us, Gentiles, as heirs of Abraham. Gal. iii. 14. *That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.* Being interested, therefore, in this covenant, we have a right to the same promises, so far as they contain grace in them that may be properly communicated to us. And therefore the house of David, in this prophecy of Zechariah, doth not only signify the natural descendants of David the King, but

very properly includes the family of Christ, the true David; Believers, that are his children, and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and members of the true church, whether they were originally Jews, or Gentiles: For in Christ Jesus men are not known by these distinctions, *there is neither Jew nor Greek*, Gal. iii. 28.

2d Text. Luke xi. 13. After Christ had answered the request of his disciples, and taught them how to pray, by giving them a pattern of prayer, he recommends them to ask his Father for the Holy Spirit, in order to a fuller and further assistance, and instruction in this work of prayer, as the whole context seems to intimate.

3d Text. Rom. viii. 26. *The Spirit helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* This cannot be interpreted as though the Holy Spirit assumed the work of Christ, who is our proper intercessor and advocate; for the Spirit not being cloathed with human nature, cannot properly be represented under such an inferior character, as the nature of prayer or petition seems to imply; whereas our Lord Jesus Christ, being man as well as God, may properly assume the character of a petitioner. The business of the Holy Spirit therefore is, to teach and help us to plead with God in prayer for the things which we want. And this will appear evidently by the next scripture.

4th Text. Gal. iv. 6. *God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.* That is, the Spirit of God inclines and teaches us to address God in prayer, as our Father. And so it is explained, Rom. viii. 15. *Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father.* It may be noted here, that this Spirit of adoption belongs to every true Christian in more or less degrees, otherwise the apostle's reasoning would not appear strong and convincing. *Because ye are sons, he hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son, &c.*

5th Text. Eph. vi. 18. *Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.* These words EN PNEUMATI (*in the Spirit*) have reference to the work of the Spirit of God in us, for so the words EN PNEUMATI signify in other places of the New Testament; Mat. xii. 28. *I cast out devils by the Spirit of God.* Luke ii. 27. *He came by the Spirit into the temple.* 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9. *To one is given by the Spirit, the word of wisdom, to another, knowledge, by the same Spirit, &c.* In this verse of the Epistle to the Ephesians, it cannot properly signify *praying with our own spirit*, that is, with the intention of our own minds, because that seems to be implied in the next words, *watching thereunto.*

Objection. Some will say still, that this *praying in the spirit* was to be performed by an extraordinary gift, which was communicated to the apostles, and

many others in the first age of Christianity; something like the gift of tongues at Pentecost; and various gifts among the Corinthians, when they prayed, and preached, and sung by inspiration, 1 Cor. xiv.

Answer. Whatsoever there was of extraordinary and miraculous communications of the Spirit in those first days of the gospel, we pretend not to the same now. But the assistances of the Spirit, whereof we speak, are in some measure attainable by Christians in all ages; for in this, Eph vi. 18. *Praying in the Spirit* is enjoined to all believers, and at all times, with all sorts of prayer. Now it is not to be supposed that at all times, and in all sorts of prayer, Christians should have this extraordinary gift.

We may also further remark, that the *gift of prayer* itself is not expressed as such an extraordinary and miraculous gift, neither in the prophecy of Joel, Chap. ii. nor in Acts, Chap. ii. where that prophecy of Joel is accomplished; nor is it mentioned particularly in the Epistles of St. Paul, among the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, in those places where they are enumerated. But only the *gift of prayer in an unknown tongue* seems to be spoken of in 1 Cor. xiv. which rather refers to the *gift of tongues*, than to that of *prayer*. And it is not unlikely, that the omission of silence of the *gift of prayer* in those texts, might be designed for this very purpose, namely, that though there were gifts of prayer by immediate inspiration in those days; yet that there should be no bar laid a-

gainst the expectation of Christians in all ages of some divine assistances in prayer, by a pretence that this was only an extraordinary gift to the apostles, and the first Christians.

6th Text. James v. 16. which we translate the *effectual fervent prayer of the righteous*. In the original it is 'DEESIS ENERGOUMENE,' 'the inwrought prayer.' This word is used to signify persons possessed with a good or evil spirit; and it signifies here prayer wrought in us by the good spirit that possesses us, that leads us and guides us. And the word is used in this sense several times in 1 Cor. xii. where the gifts of the Holy Spirit are spoken of. Yet let it be observed, that here the apostle is speaking of such an inwrought prayer as all Christians might be capable of; for his epistle is directed to all the scattered tribes of Israel, James i. 1. and he bids them all *confess their faults to one another, and pray for one another, that they may be healed*; and for this reason, because the *inwrought prayer of the righteous avail-eth much*.

The last text I shall mention is Jude, verse 20. *Praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God*. Now this epistle is written to all that are *sanctified by God the Father, preserved and called in Jesus Christ*, verse 1. They are all directed to pray by the assistance of the Holy Ghost; and those *who have not this Spirit*, in verse 19, are said to be *sensual*.

I confess, the Holy Spirit hath been, in a great measure, so long departed from his churches, that we are tempted to think, that all his operations, in exhortations, in prayer, and preaching, belong only to the first ages of christianity, and to the extraordinary ministers, prophets, and apostles; and it was from this absence of the Spirit that men proceeded to invent various methods to supply the want of him in prayer, by pater-nosters, beads, litanies, responses, and other forms, some good and some bad, to which they confined the churches, to keep up the form of worship, and the attention of the people; and, at best, we are left by many teachers to the use of our mere natural powers, our reason and memory; and hence spring those reproachful expressions about the Spirit of prayer, and the endless labors of men to make this word signify only the temper and disposition of the mind: so the Spirit of adoption, in their sense, is nothing but a child-like temper, and the Spirit of prayer means nothing else but a praying frame of heart.

But since some texts expressly speak of the Holy Spirit as working these things in us; since in many scriptures the Spirit of God is promised to be given us, to dwell in us, and be in us, and to assist in prayer, why should we industriously exclude him from the hearts of the saints, and thrust him out of those scriptures, wheresoever the words will possibly endure any other sense?

It is in my opinion much more natural and reasonable for us to interpret those places where the Spirit

is mentioned, according to the plain language of clear texts, where the name of God's own Spirit is written

However, if a man will but allow the Spirit of God and his assistances in prayer, to be mentioned in any one text of scripture, so far as to be persuaded and encouraged thereby to seek those assistances that he may pray better, I will not be angry with him, that he cannot find this Spirit in every text where others believe he is spoken of and designed.

II. The second argument for the aids of the Holy Spirit in prayer, is drawn from collateral scriptures, and such are all those texts which represent the blessed Spirit as the spring of all that is good in us, and shew us that all other duties of the Christian life are to be performed in and by this Holy Spirit. Saints are *born of this Spirit*. John iii. 6. *Are led by the Spirit*. Rom. viii. 14. *Walk in the Spirit*. Gal. v. 16. *Live in the Spirit*, verse 25. *By this Spirit mortify the deeds of the body*. Rom. viii. 13. The Spirit *convinces of sin*, John xvi. 9. and fits us for confession. The Spirit *witnesseth with our spirits that we are the children of God*, Rom. viii. 16. and thereby furnishes us with thanksgivings. The Spirit sanctifies us, and fills us with love, and faith, and humility, and every grace that is needful in the work of prayer. Why then should men take so much pains to hinder us from *praying by the Spirit*, when it is only *by this Spirit we can walk with God, and have access to God*. Eph. ii. 18.

III. The third argument to prove that the Spirit of God doth sometimes assist men in the work of prayer, is the experience of all Christians with regard to the grace of prayer, and many Christians in the exercise of the gift of it too. The great difference that is between some believers and others in this respect, even where their natural abilities are equal, and the difference that is between believers themselves at different times and seasons, seems to denote the presence or absence of the Holy Spirit. Some persons at some special seasons will break out into a divine rapture in prayer, and be carried far beyond themselves: Their thoughts, their desires, their language, and every thing that belongs to their prayer, seems to have something of heaven in it.

I will allow that in some persons this may be ascribed to a greater degree of understanding, invention, fancy, memory, and natural affections of the mind, and volubility of the tongue; but many times also it shall be observed, that those persons who have this gift of prayer in exercise, do not excel nor equal the rest of their neighbors in fancy, invention, passion, or eloquence; it may be, they are persons of very mean parts, and below the common capacity of mankind.

Nor can it be always imputed to an overflow of animal nature, and warm imagination, at those times when they are carried out in prayer thus beyond themselves; for this happens sometimes when they

find their natural spirits not raised nor exalted, but the powers of nature labor perhaps under a decay and great languishings, and they can hardly speak or think about common affairs. I wish these testimonies to the aids of the Holy Spirit were more frequent amongst us.

Reflection. And it may be remarked, that those who despise this gift of the Holy Spirit, will deride the persons that pretend to any share of it, as foolish, stupid, ignorant wretches, and will represent them generally as unlearned and sottish creatures, dull and unthinking; and yet when this objection is made, Whence comes this fluency, this fervor, and this wonderful ability of pouring out the soul before God in prayer, which the scoffers themselves cannot imitate? O! then it is attributed to our wit, our memory, our invention, our fancy, our vehement affections, our confidence or impudence; to any thing rather than to the Spirit of God, because they are resolved to oppose his power, and deny his work in the hearts of believers.

I might here add citations from the articles and liturgy of the church of England, to confirm the doctrine of the aids of the Holy Spirit in our religious performances. "We have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will," *Art. x.* "The working of the Spirit, it, drawing up the mind to high and heavenly things." *Art. xvii.* And this ordinary work of the Holy Spirit

it in all believers, is called "*the inspiration of the, Holy Spirit.*" Art. xiii. "O God, from whom all
" holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works
" do proceed." *Second Collect at Evening Prayer.*
And a little after; "Almighty God, who hast given
" us grace to make our common supplications." And
in the *Collect, the fifth Sunday after Easter*, "Grant
" that by thy inspiration we may think those things
" that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may per-
" form the same." Again, "Almighty God, of whose
" only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto
" thee true and laudable service." *Thirteenth Sunday*
after Trinity. "Grant that thy Holy Spirit may in
" all things direct and rule our hearts." *Nineteenth*
Sunday after Trinity. Homily xvith, p. 1, 2. asserts,
"the secret and mighty working of God's Holy Spir-
" it which is within us: For it is the Holy Ghost,
" and no other thing, stirring up good and godly mo-
" tions in their heart." Many more expressions of
this kind might be collected from the homilies and
public prayers of the church of England; so that one
would think none of that communion should throw
reproach and scandal upon the assistance of the Holy
Spirit in good works and religious duties.

S E C T. II.

How far the SPIRIT assists us in PRAYER.

IT is evident then that there is such a thing as the assistance of the SPIRIT of GOD in the work of PRAYER, but how far this assistance extends, is a farther subject of inquiry, and it is very necessary to have a just notion of the nature and bounds of this divine influence, that we may not expect more than God has promised, nor sit down negligently contented without such degrees as may be attained.

Persons in this, as in most other cases, are very ready to run into extremes. They either attribute too much or too little to the Holy Spirit.

In my judgment those persons attribute too little to the Spirit of prayer,

1. ‘ Who say there is no more assistance to be expected in prayer than in any ordinary and common affair of life; as when the ploughman breaks the clods of his ground, and casts in the wheat and the barley, his God doth instruct him to discretion, and teach him.’ Isa. xxviii. 24—26. But this is in effect to deny his special influences.

2. ‘ Those who allow the Spirit of God merely to excite some holy motions in the heart while they

‘pray, and to awaken something of grace into exercise, according to the words of a prayer;’ but that he does nothing towards our obtaining the ability or gift of praying, nor at all assists us in the exercise of the gift with proper matter, method, or expression.

I persuade myself, the scriptures cited in the foregoing section, concerning praying in the Spirit, can never be explained this way in their full meaning; and I hope to make it apparent in this section, that the Holy Spirit hath more hand in prayer, than both these opinions allow.

I think also, on the other hand, those persons expect too much from the Spirit in our day,

1. ‘Who wait for all their inclinations to pray from immediate and present dictates of the Spirit of God;’ who will never pray but when the Spirit moves them. I find in scripture frequent exhortations to pray, and commands to pray always, that is, to pray upon all occasions; yet I find no promise nor encouragement to expect the Holy Spirit will, by sudden and immediate impulses in a sensible way, dictate to me every season of prayer. For though the Spirit of God should sometimes withdraw himself in his influences, yet my duty and obligation to constant prayer still remain.

2. ‘Those who expect such aids of the Holy Spirit as to make their prayers become the proper work

‘of inspiration; such as the prayers of David and Moses, and others recorded in scripture.’ Let us not be so fond as to persuade ourselves that these workings of the Holy Spirit in ministers, or in common Christians, while they teach, or exhort, or pray, rise to the character of those miraculous gifts that were given to the apostles and primitive believers; such as are described in the church of Corinth, and elsewhere; for at those times a whole sermon, or a whole prayer together, was a constant impulse of the Holy Spirit, perhaps for the words as well as all the matter of it, which made it truly divine. But in our prayers the Spirit of God leaves us much to ourselves, to mingle many weaknesses and defects with our duties, both in the matter, and in the manner, and in the words; so that we cannot say of one whole sentence, that it is the perfect or the pure work of the Spirit of God: And we should run the danger of blasphemy to intitle the Spirit of God to every thing that we speak in prayer, as well as to exclude all his assistances from all the prayers of the saints in our day.

3. ‘Those who hope for such influences of the Spirit as to render their own study and labors needless;’ who never have given diligence to furnish themselves in a rational way with an ability to pray, upon presumption of those divine impulses, nor upon any occasion will premeditate beforehand, but rush upon the duty, as Peter went out at Christ’s command to walk upon the water, and hope to be upheld and carried through all the duty without their own forethought;

they will cite the text which was given to the disciples. Matt. x. 19. *When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.* But this text has quite another design.

It may be questioned whether this word of Christ forbids them all premeditation, but only an anxious and solicitous fear and care, as we are bid to *take no thought for the morrow*, Matt. vi. 34. that is, Be not over-solicitous or disquieted about provision for the morrow. But if Christ did utterly forbid them all preparation, yet that command and promise to the apostles in miraculous times, when they should appear before magistrates, can never be given to encourage the sloth and laziness of every common Christian in our day, when he appears in worship before God.

Now in order to find the happy medium between these two extremes, of attributing too much or too little to the Spirit of prayer, I have diligently consulted the word of God; and so far as I am able to judge or determine, his assistance in prayer may be reduced to the following particulars:

1. "He bestows upon us our natural capacities, some degree of understanding, judgment, memory, invention, and natural affections; some measure of confidence and liberty of speech, and readiness to utter the conceptions of our mind."

And this he doth to believers in common with other men, for *every good gift comes from God*. Jam. i. 17. And in a particular manner the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Ghost, is generally represented as the agent in such sort of operations, especially where they relate to religion.

2. 'He blesses our diligence in reading, hearing, meditation, study, and attempts of prayer,' whereby, while we attend to useful rules and instructions, we treasure up a store of matter for this duty, and learn by degrees to express our thoughts with propriety and decency, to our own and others edification.— Thus he adds a blessing to our studies, in order to grow in the knowledge of the things of God as Christians; and in the learning of tongues to interpret scripture, and in the holy skill of exhortation, in order to become able ministers.

All these are called *spiritual gifts* because, (as is before shewn) in the primitive times they were given on the sudden, in an extraordinary manner, without laborious study to acquire them: but in our day these are to be obtained and improved by labor and use, by repeated trials, by time and experience, and the ordinary blessing of the Spirit of God; and the same must be said concerning the gift of prayer. He sanctifies our memory to treasure up such parts of the holy scripture as are proper to be used in prayer; he makes it faithful to retain them, and ready in the recollection of them at proper seasons. If men be—

come skilful in any faculty, and especially that belongs to religion, it is justly attributed to God and his Spirit; for if he teaches the plowman to manage wisely in sowing and reaping, Isa. xxviii. 26, 29. much more doth he teach the Christian to pray. He divides to every one what gifts he pleases, and works according to his good pleasure, 1 Cor. xii. from ver. 4. to ver. 11. All secondary helps and means, when well attended to, and well applied, are made successful by his powerful benediction. And we may say to those Christians who have the greatest gifts in prayer, *Who made thee to differ from another? And what hast thou, that thou hast not received?* 1 Cor. iv. 7. For if we live not by bread alone, but by every word of power and blessing that proceeds from the mouth of God, Matt. iv. 4. much more may we say concerning the spiritual improvements of the mind, that they are not attained by our labor alone, but by the good Spirit of God making our labor prosperous.

3. 'He inclines our hearts to pray, and keeps them intent upon the work.' By nature there is in all men an estrangedness from God, and there is too much of it remaining in the best. There is a natural reluctance to the duties of immediate communion with God, and a weariness in them. It is only the Spirit of God that works a heavenly frame in us, that makes us ready to pray always, and excites us to take occasion, from the several concerns of our souls, or from the affairs of life, to go to the mercy-seat, and to abide there. It is he that kindly and secretly suggests, *Now is the*

accepted time. The Spirit says to the soul secretly, *Seek my face*; and the soul replies, *Thy face, O God, will I seek.* Psal. xxvii. 8. *The Spirit saith, Come to God by prayer, as well as to Christ by faith.* Rev. xxii. 19.—It is he that enlarges the desires towards God, and gives silent intimations of audience and acceptance. By his good motions he overcomes our delay, and answers the carnal objections of our sinful and slothful hearts. He gives our spirits liberty for the work, as well as in it, and recalls our thoughts when wandering from God in worship, whether they be drawn away by our eyes, or our ears, or our busy fancies, or the suggestions of the evil one. It is the Holy Spirit that holds us to the duty, in opposition to all discouragements, and makes us wrestle and strive with God in prayer, pour out our hearts before him, and stir up ourselves to take hold of him, agreeable to the language of those scriptures, Genesis xxxii. 24. Romans xv. 30. Psalm lxii. 8. Isaiah lxiv. 7. Now the means which the Spirit of God generally uses to bring us to prayer, and keep us to the duty, is by working in our souls a lively sense of the necessity and advantage of it, or giving us some refreshment and delight in and by it.

And if when we are engaged in our worldly affairs, or in divine worship, the devil is permitted, by sudden violent impressions on the fancy, to draw our hearts away to sinful objects, why should it be counted a strange thing, that the blessed Spirit should call in holy motions and encouragements to duty?

4. 'He oftentimes, by his secret teachings, supplies us with the matter of prayer.' This is the express language of holy scripture. Rom. viii. 26. *The Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, and that according to the mind or will of God,* verse 27. All the senses that the wit of man has contrived to put upon this scripture, to exclude the work of the Spirit of God, are very much forced and strained to make them signify any thing else.

It is plain that *we know not what is good* for ourselves, Eccles. vi. 12. and we of ourselves should often ask for things hurtful to us. James iv. 3. We are not acquainted with our own wants, nor the method of our relief. It is the Spirit that must convince us of sin and righteousness; of our sin and the righteousness of Christ. John xvi. 9. He is a Spirit of illumination in all the affairs of religion: It is he alone *that searches the deep things of God, that knows what God hath prepared for believers.* 1 Cor. ii. 9. And therefore he makes intercession, or teaches us to pray for things agreeably to the divine will and purpose. He now and then also gives a hint of some argument to plead with God; either the name or mediation of Christ or some of his own promises in the gospel; for he has promised to *take of the things of Christ, and shew them unto us.* John xiv. 26. and John xvi. 13, 14, 15. It is he that brings divine things to our remembrance; such things as are suited to the several

parts of prayer. He sets the glory and the majesty of God before our eyes, and furnishes us with matter for adoration. By bringing sin to our remembrance, he fits us for confession; and by causing us to reflect on our many mercies, richly supplies us with thanksgivings.

Now, since the evil spirit is said to pluck the good *seed of the word of God out of the heart*, Matt. xiii. 19. why may we not suppose the good spirit to put good thoughts into our heart, to prepare and furnish us for such a duty as prayer? And such kind of influences as these are called the good motions of the Spirit of God, which Christians of almost every sect and persuasion will allow in some degree.

5. ‘When the Spirit of God supplies us largely
‘with matter in prayer, he doth, in some measure,
‘influence the method too.’ Method is but the disposition of the materials of a prayer one after another. Now as it is impossible our tongues should speak all these together, so it is not possible our minds should receive all the kind hints of them from the Spirit at once, but successively one after another, as seems good to him. Sometimes he fills our souls with so deep and penitent a sense of our past sins, that we break out before God into humble confessions in the very beginning of prayer: “O Lord, I am vile, what shall
“I answer thee? Mine iniquities are gone over my
“head, and the number of them is infinite.” And perhaps the soul dwells upon its humiliations through almost all the time of worship.

At another time the Spirit works as the spirit of joy and thanksgiving; and the first words the lips utter are the language of gratitude and praise: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou the mysteries of the gospel are hidden from the wise and prudent, yet thou hast revealed them unto babes."

Sometimes the soul is so inflamed with desire after such a particular grace, or mortification of some special sin, that almost from every part of prayer, from adoration, confession, thanksgiving, &c. it will fetch some argument for bestowing that mercy, and at every turn insert that special petition, inforcing it with new arguments and pleadings.

Thus though the beautiful connexion of one sentence with another, and the smooth and easy transition from one part of prayer to another, be left much to ourselves, yet the mere order of those materials, which the Holy Spirit gives in while we pray, will be in some degree under his direction or influence. And if we may understand those words of Elihu in a literal sense, Job xxxvii. 19. we have need of assistance in matter, method, and every thing when we speak to God, and may well cry out, "Lord, teach us what we should say to thee, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness:" we need light and instruction from thee to frame our speeches, and put them in order.

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6. 'The Spirit may be said to give some assistance 'also toward apt and proper expression in prayer.' For he concurs in an ordinary way to the exercise of our natural and acquired faculties of knowledge, memory, vivacity of spirit, readiness of speech, and holy confidence, whereby we express those thoughts which he hath excited in us in a becoming manner. And this he doth also in preaching, and conferring upon the things of God, and this more eminently in the work of prayer; so that hereby a believer is able at some times to pour out his soul before God, with a fulness of thought, and variety of expression, to the great comfort of his own soul, and the edification of his fellow-worshippers. St. Paul speaks of this *boldness* and *utterance*, as a spiritual gift, 1 Cor. i. 5. and 2 Cor. viii. 7. And he often prayed for this *confidence* and *freedom of speech*, this (PARRHESIA) in preaching, Eph. vi. 19. Col. iv. 3, 4. And we also have reason to ask it of God in prayer; for it is as necessary also in that duty, for carrying on the work of grace in our hearts, and the building up of the church, the body of Christ, for which all gifts are given.

I might add also, that as the Holy Spirit frequently by secret hints, supplies us with the matter of prayer, he by that very means assists us, toward expression; for 'Expression is but the cloathing our tho'ts 'or ideas in proper words.' Now in this state, where the soul and body are so united, the most part of the ideas and conceptions of our mind are so joined to words, that words arise as it were mingled with those

ideas or conceptions which the Holy Spirit awakens within us. And we may humbly hope, that when he hath given us some secret whispers what we should pray for, he will at least so far enable us to use proper expressions, as may convey the same thoughts and matter to those who join with us in worship.

Especially when proper materials of prayer are brought to our mind in scripture-expressions, in some sense these are words which the *Holy Ghost teacheth*, that Spirit which is promised to *bring to our remembrance the things which Christ hath taught us*. But this is more evidently so at that time, when, together with these expressions, the graces of prayer are wro't up to a lively exercise, which is the next step of the assistance of the Spirit.

7. 'He excites those graces in us, which are suited to the duty of prayer.' He spiritualizes our natural affections, and fixes them on proper objects, and enlarges and heightens their activity. When sin is recollected, he awakens anger, shame, and sorrow. When God is revealed to the mind in his glory and justice, he overspreads the soul with holy awe, and humble fear. When the Lord Jesus Christ and his redemption are upon the thoughts, the Holy Spirit warms and raises our desire and love. We are in ourselves cold and dead to spiritual things, he makes us lively in prayer, and holds us to the work; he begets a holy reverence of God while we adore him; he works in us delight in God, and longing desires after

him; fervency and importunity in our petitions for spiritual mercies; submission and resignation to the will of God in temporal things; faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and hope in the promises of the gospel, while we plead with God for an answer to our prayers; he fills us also with holy joy and exultation in God, while we recollect in prayer his glories or his benefits, and awaken all the springs of thankfulness. As those qualities in their first operation, are attributed to the Spirit of God (which is not my present business to prove) so in their constant exercise in every duty, they want his farther assistance and efficacy, since *of ourselves*, an apostle could say, *we are not sufficient for one good thought*, 1 Cor. iii. 5. *but all our sufficiency is of God*; it is God of his good pleasure who worketh in us both to will and to do, Phil. ii. 13. He gives us sincere aims and designs, in our petitions; for as to the manner of our prayers, there is the assistance of the Spirit necessary, as well as to the matter; and it is hinted in the text before cited, Rom. viii. 26. *We know not what to pray for, as we ought, but the Spirit helpeth us*. He influences our minds with a true and upright aim at the glory of God, and our salvation; for otherwise we are ready to ask good things amiss, that we may spend them on our lusts, James iv. 3.

This work of the Spirit in awakening our graces though it be mentioned last, yet it oftens begins before the prayer, and precedes his other influences, or our own labor, in speaking to God.

Thus have I delivered my sentiments at large, concerning ‘the extent of the influences of the Spirit of God in prayer,’ and have shewn how he qualifies us habitually for prayer, actually disposes and prepares us for it, and gives us present assistance in it. And after all, I would say, that the most considerable and common assistance in prayer, which is peculiarly attributed to the Blessed Spirit, as a *Spirit of prayer*, and may be expected from him in our day, consists chiefly in this; the putting our souls into a praying frame; the stirring up holy motions and breathings after God, giving secret hints of our real wants, and of arguments and promises to plead with God, awakening the graces of love, fear, hope, and joy, that are suited to this duty; and it is chiefly upon this account that he is called a *Spirit of grace and supplication*. When these are raised to a high degree, the heart will have a natural influence upon the invention, the memory, the language, and the voice. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak.* And for the most part the utterance will be proportionable to the degree of inward affection, and to the natural and acquired abilities of the person that prays; excepting some rare and glorious instances, where men are carried beyond themselves, by the uncommon presence of the divine Spirit.

‘I might venture upon this subject, to make an address to those persons who will entertain nothing in religion, but what appears agreeable to principles of *reason and philosophy*, and yet have taken liberty

‘to scoff at divine assistances in the duty of prayer.’ Let me intreat you, sirs, to tell me what is there in this doctrine that is unreasonable to assert, or unbecoming a philosopher to believe? If the great God has required every man to pray, and will hear and reward the humble and sincere worshipper; why may we not suppose he is so compassionate as to help us in this work which he requires? Is not he full of goodness, and ready to accept those sinners that return to him? And why shall not the same goodness incline him to assist those that desire and attempt, to return? Why may he not by secret impressions draw out further the desires of that soul that already breathes after him, when he sees the spirit willing and feeble, and thus sweetly encourage the worship he delights in, and prepare his servants for his own reward?

‘This address may be repeated to Christians that profess the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, with much more force and argument.’ Do you believe the Almighty God sent his own Son to teach us how to pray, and when we are taught the right way, why may not his own Spirit assist in the performance? Hath Jesus Christ purchased heaven for us, and may not the Spirit be permitted to incline us to ask for that heaven, and awaken our desires to seek it? When the Son of God saw us perishing in guilt and misery, did he descend and relieve and save us by dying for us? And when the Spirit of God beholds a poor creature willing to receive this relief and salvation, and yet is afraid to venture into the presence of an offended God;

why may he not give secret hints of encouragement, and draw out the addresses of the heart and lips to a God that is willing to pardon? When he sees an humble sinner laboring and striving to break through temptations, to lay aside vain thoughts, to put carnal things far away from the mind, and to converse with God alone; why may he not impress some divine thoughts upon him, stir up devout and strong affections, make him surmount his difficulties, and raise him a little towards his heavenly Father? Since he has given him faculties of memory, invention, and speech; why may he not assist those faculties, when directed towards himself, and make them swifter and warmer in their advances toward God? To what purpose is the blessed Spirit mentioned so often in the New Testament as one that helps forward the salvation of men? To what purpose does he sustain so many characters and offices in scripture? And to what end is he so often promised to Christians, to be with them, and dwell in them as a most glorious blessing of the gospel; if he be not permitted to do so much as this in assisting men to draw near to their Maker, and helping the children of God on earth, to converse with their Father which is in heaven? Now, if such condescensions as these are not unworthy of the blessed God, why should it be unworthy of a man, or a Christian to believe them and hope for them?

S E C T. III.

Cautions about the INFLUENCES of the SPIRIT.

THERE are many practical cases that arise upon this subject, of the *assistance of the Spirit of prayer*, which exercise the thoughts of honest and pious persons. It is not my purpose here to enlarge in this way; yet that I may prevent or obviate some difficulties, I would lay down these few *Cautions*:

1. *First Caution.* ‘Do not believe all manner of impulses, or urgent impressions of the mind to go and pray, proceed always from the blessed Spirit.’ Sometimes the mere terrors of conscience, awakened under a sense of guilt and danger, will urge a natural man to go to prayer. So the sailors in Jonah’s ship, when surprised with a storm, each of them fell a praying. Though the Spirit of God, in his own operations, makes much use of the consciences of men to carry on his own work, yet when these inward impulses to pray arise merely from some affrightning providence, or sudden conviction and torment of mind, and thus drag us into the presence of God, without any assistance and strength to perform the duty, and without much regard to the success of the duty, we may justly fear the Holy Spirit of God hath not much hand in such impulses; for he both assists in the duty, and makes us solicitous about the success of it.

Sometimes Satan himself may so far *transform himself into an angel of light*, as to hurry and impel a person to go and pray. But his impulses are generally violent and unseasonable. When we are engaged in some other business that is the proper duty of that season, he tyrannically commands in a moment to leave all, and to go aside and pray. But the Spirit of God draws us to God at a fit season, so as never to thrust out another necessary duty toward God or toward men. He is a God of order, and his Spirit always excites to the proper duty of the hour; wherefore Satan would but divert us from one business by forcing us away to another, and then leave us to our own weakness in it, and vex us afterward with accusations.

2. *Second Caution.* ‘Do not expect the influences of the Spirit of prayer should be so vehement and sensible, as certainly to distinguish them from the motions of your own spirits’ For the Spirit of God generally acts toward his people agreeably to the dispensations under which they are, either in a more sensible, or a more imperceptible way.

Under the Old Testament, the Spirit of God often carried the prophets away, as if it were in an ecstasy, beyond themselves; their style, their gesture, as well as inward commotions of heart, were frequently different from the common manner of men, and did sufficiently evidence to themselves, and in some measure to others also, that they were under the impressions of the Holy Spirit at special seasons.

Under the New Testament, the apostles had a more constant and habitual assistance of the Spirit, though it was extraordinary also; and in a calmer way were influenced in prayer, and preaching more agreeable to rational nature; though without doubt they themselves well knew, when they were under the certain conduct of the Holy Spirit.

In our day, when we have no reason to expect extraordinary inspirations, the Spirit of God usually leads us in so soft and silent a manner, agreeable to the temper of our own spirits, and concurrent circumstances of life, that his workings are not to be easily distinguished by ourselves or others, from the rational motions of our own hearts, influenced by moral arguments; though by the whole tendency, and the sanctifying effects, we know we had some assistance of the blessed Spirit.

Such are his operations generally in conversion, sanctification, and consolation; he works so continually and sweetly with our own spirits, that we cannot certainly distinguish his working by any vehemence or strength of impression; but it is best known by the favor and relish of divine things that we then feel in our souls, and by consequent fruits of sanctification in our hearts and lives.

3. *Third Caution.* ‘ Though we have not any sure ground to expect extraordinary influences from the Spirit of prayer in our day, yet we ought not to de-

‘ny them utterly;’ for God hath no where bound himself not to bestow them: The chief ends for which immediate inspirations were given, are long ceased among us, where the gospel is so well established; yet there have not been wanting instances in every age of some extraordinary testimonies of the Spirit of God to the truth of the gospel, both for conviction of unbelievers, and for the instruction, encouragement, and consolation of his own people.

In the conversion of a sinner, the Spirit’s work is usually gradual, and begun and carried on by providences, sermons, occasional thoughts, and moral arguments, from time to time, till at last the man is become a new creature, and resolves heartily to give up himself to Christ according to the encouragements of the gospel. Yet there are now and then some surprising and sudden conversions wrought by the overpowering influences of the Holy Spirit, something like the conversion of St. Paul.

In the consolation of a sinner, the Spirit generally assists their own minds in comparing their hearts with the rule of the word, and makes it appear they are the children of God, by finding the characters of adoption in themselves; this is his ordinary way of witnessing: But there are instances when the Spirit of God hath, in a more immediate manner, spoken consolation, and constrained the poor trembling believer to receive it: And this hath been evidenced to be divine, by the humility and advancing holiness that hath followed upon it.

So it is in prayer. The ordinary assistances of the Spirit, given in our day to ministers or private Christians, in their utmost extent, imply no more than what I have described in the foregoing chapter: But there are instances wherein the Spirit of God hath carried a devout person in worship far beyond his own natural and acquired powers in the exercise of the *gift of prayer*, and raised him to an uncommon and exalted degree of the exercise of *praying graces*, very near to those divine impulses which the primitive Christians enjoyed.

If a minister in a public assembly has been enabled to make his addresses to God with such a flow of divine eloquence, and spread the cases of the whole assembly before the Lord in such expressive language, that almost every one present hath been ready to confess, *surely he knew all my heart*; if they have all felt something of a divine power attending his words, drawing their hearts near to the throne, and giving them a taste of heaven; if sinners have been converted in numbers, and saints have been made triumphant in grace, and received blessed advances towards glory: I would not be afraid to say, ‘surely God is in this place present with the extraordinary power and influence of his Spirit.’ If a Christian hath been taught by this Spirit, making intercession in him to plead with God for some particular mercy, in such an unwonted strain of humble and heavenly argument, that he has found in himself secret and inward assurances that the mercy should be bestowed, by something of a pro-

phetical impulse, and has never been mistaken; if grace has been in vigorous exercise in the prayer, and afterwards the success has always answered his expectation; I should not forbear to believe the extraordinary presence of the *Spirit of prayer* with him at that season. Dr. WINTER, in Ireland, and several ministers and private Christians of the last age, in Scotland, are notable and glorious instances of this gracious *appearance of the Holy Spirit*.

If a serious and humble worshipper, that hath been long seeking after the knowledge of some divine truth, should find himself enlightened upon his knees, with a beam of heavenly light shining upon that truth with most peculiar evidence, and teaching him more in one prayer, than he had learned by months of labor and study; I should venture to acknowledge ‘the immediate aid and answer of the Spirit of prayer and illumination.’ LUTHER is said to have enjoyed such divine favors, at the reformation of the church from Popish darkness.

If a holy soul hath been confiding with doubts and fears, and waiting upon God in all his appointed ways of grace, seeking consolation and assurance of the love of God: if while he hath been at the throne of grace he has beheld God as his God, smiling and reconciled, and as it were, seen the work of God on his own heart, in a bright and convincing light; and perhaps by some comfortable word of scripture impress on his thoughts, hath been assured

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of his love to God, and the love of God to him: If from that immediate sensation of divine love he has been filled *with joy unspeakable and full of glory*, as well as warmed with heavenly zeal for the honor of God, his God and Father; I must believe such an one to be sealed as a child of God, by the sweet influences of the *Spirit of adoption*, teaching him to pray and to cry *Abba, Father*.

But concerning such workings of the Spirit of God as these are, because there have been many vain and foolish pretences to them, I would make three remarks.

1. These are rare instances, and bestowed by the Spirit of God in so sovereign and arbitrary a manner, according to the secret councils of his own wisdom, that no particular Christian hath any sure ground to expect them. Though I am persuaded there are many more instances of them in secret, among pious and humble souls, than ever came to public notice.

2. They are best judged of, and distinguished from the mere effects of a warm fancy, and from the Spirit of delusion, not so much by the brightness and vehemence of the present impression, as by their agreeableness to the standing rule of the word of God, and their influence towards humility and growing holiness. There is therefore the same rule to judge of the *uncommon*, as well as the *common assistances* of this Spirit of supplication.

3. How near soever these rare and extraordinary impulses come to the inspiration of the apostles and first Christians in the truth and power of them, yet they fall far short in the distinct evidence: For the Spirit of God hath not taught us so far to distinguish any particular parts or paragraph, even of such an extraordinary prayer, as that any one can say, these are *perfect divine inspirations*; because he would have nothing stand in competition with his written word, as the rule of faith and practice of his saints.

IV. *Fourth caution.* 'Do not make the gift of prayer, the measure of your judgment concerning the Spirit of prayer.' If we follow this rule, there are three cases where we may be led into mistake.

The *first case* is, 'when the gift is in great and lively exercise.' Have a care of believing that all those persons pray by the Spirit, who pronounce very pious expressions with great seeming fervency, and much volubility of speech; when (it may be) their behavior and character in the world is sinful and abominable in the sight of God. It is true indeed, the Spirit of God sometimes bestows considerable gifts upon persons that are unconverted; but we are not immediately to believe, that every thing that is bright and beautiful is the peculiar work of the Spirit in our day, unless we have some reason to hope the person is also one of the sons of God.

Much less can we suppose, that noisy gesture, a distorted countenance, violence, and vociferation, are a-

ny signs of the presence of the divine Spirit: Sometimes indeed the extraordinary anguish of mind, or inward fervor of affection, have extorted from the saints of God loud complaints and groanings: David sometimes practised this, as appears in his Psalms. Jesus Christ himself, when pressed with sorrows heavier than man could bear, *offered up strong cries and tears in the days of his flesh*, Heb. v. 7. and we are sure the Spirit of prayer was with him. But there may be great noise and violent commotions used to make a show of fervency and power, and with a design to make up the want of inward devotion. God himself was indeed present at Sinai, with *thunder and lightning*, and *the sound of a trumpet* once, Exod. xix. But another time when he came down to visit Elijah, *he was not in the earthquake, nor in the tempest, but in the still small voice*, 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

I would not impute the difference betwixt the prayers of one minister and another, one Christian and another, merely to the presence or absence of the Holy Spirit. Natural constitutions, capacities, acquirements, natural affections, and providential circumstances, can make a great difference. Nor would I impute the difference that is betwixt the prayers of the same true Christians at different seasons, only to the unequal assistances of the blessed Spirit; for many other things may occur to make them more or less cold or fervent, dull or lively, in the exercise of the gift of prayer.

The *second case* wherein we may be in danger of mistake is, 'where there is but a small measure of the "gift of prayer."' How ready are some persons to judge that the Spirit of prayer is absent from the heart of that person that speaks to God, if he hath but a mean and contemptible gift; if he seems to repeat the same things over again; if he labors under want of words, or expresses his thoughts in improper or disagreeable language; if he hath no beauty of connexion betwixt his sentences, and hath little order or method in the several parts of prayer. Now, though such persons that have so very small and despicable a talent should not be forward to speak in prayer in a great assembly, or among strangers, till by practice in a more private way they have attained more of this holy skill; yet there may be much of the Spirit of prayer in the hearts of some such persons as these.

It may be they are young Christians, lately converted, and are but beginning to learn to pray. The business of praying is a new work to them, though their zeal be warm and their hearts lively in grace. And natural bashfulness may sometimes hinder the exercise of a good gift of prayer.

Or it may be they have very low natural parts, a poor invention and memory, a barrenness of words, or some difficulty or unhappiness in their common way of expressing themselves about other affairs; they may be some of those *foolish things of this world that*

God hath called to the knowledge of his Son, and filled their hearts with rich grace; but grace doth not so far exalt nature, as to change a dull genius and low capacity into a sprightliness of thought and vivacity of language.

Or perhaps they have long disused themselves from praying in public, and at first, when they are called to it again, they may be much at a loss as to the gift of prayer, though grace may be in its advance in the soul.

Or perhaps they are in the lively exercise of deep humility, and mourning before God under a sense of guilt, or overwhelmed with fears of divine desertion, or conflicting or wrestling hard with some hurrying temptation, or under a present depression of mind by some heavy sorrow; and may be in the case of David, Psa. lxxvii. 4. *when he was so troubled that he could not speak.*

Or finally, God may withhold from them the exercise of the gift of prayer, to punish them with shame and confusion for some neglected duty, and chastise them, it may be, for carelessness in seeking after this holy skill of speaking to God, though some graces, such as zeal and love, may be at work in the heart.

Sometimes it may happen that the *Spirit of prayer* is communicated in a great degree to an humble Christian, who falls into many thoughtless indecen-

cies of gesture in prayer, or delivers his sentences with a most unhappy tone of voice: Perhaps he was never taught to practise decency when he was young, and such ill habits are not easily cured afterward. We are not therefore to despise and be offended at all such prayers, but endeavor to separate what is pious and divine from the human frailty and weakness, to pity such persons heartily, and be so much the more excited ourselves to seek after every thing that is agreeable in the gift of prayer.

The *third case* wherein we are in danger of mistake, is, 'When the gift is not exercised at all.' Some persons have been ready to imagine they could not *pray by the Spirit*, but when they exercised the gift of prayer themselves; but this is a great mistake. For though one person be the mouth of the rest to God, yet every one that joins with him may be justly said to *pray in Spirit*, if all the graces that are suited to the duty of prayer, and to the expressions that are then used, are found in exercise and lively vigor. And it is possible that a poor humble Christian may pray in the Spirit, in the secret and silence of his heart, while the person that speaks to God in the name of others, hath very little or nothing of the Spirit of God with him, or when the words of the prayer are a known and prescribed form. Though *the Spirit of prayer*, in the common language of Christians, is never applied to the exercise of the gift, where there is no grace; yet it is often applied to the exercise of the grace of prayer, without any regard to the gift.

V. *Fifth caution.* ‘Do not expect the same measures of assistance at all times from the Spirit of prayer.’ He has no where bound himself to be always present with his people in the same degrees of influence; though he will never utterly forsake those, of whose hearts he has taken possession as his temple and residence. He is compared to the wind by our Lord Jesus Christ, John. iii. 8. *The wind blows where, and when it listeth*, though not always equal in the strength of its gales, nor constant in blowing on the same part of the earth. The Holy Spirit is a sovereign and free agent, and dispenses his favors in what measure he pleaseth, and at what seasons he will.

Those therefore that enjoy at present a large share of assistance from the Spirit of prayer, should not presume upon it that they shall always enjoy the same. Those that have in any measure lost it, should not despair of recovering it again: And those that have not yet been blest with his influences, may humbly hope to attain them by seeking. And this naturally leads me to the following section.

S E C T. IV.

Directions to obtain and keep the SPIRIT of PRAYER.

THE last thing I proposed is, to give some *directions* how to obtain and to keep the assistance of the Holy Spirit; and they are such as these:

Direction 1. ‘ Seek earnestly after converting grace
‘ and faith in Jesus Christ.’ For the Spirit of grace
and of supplication dwells in believers only. He may
visit others as he is the author of some spiritual gifts,
but he abides only with the saints. The sons of God
are so many *temples of his Holy Spirit*, 1 Cor. iii. 16.
and he perfumes their souls with the sweet incense of
prayer ascending up from their hearts to God who
dwells in heaven. If we *are in the flesh*, that is, in an
unconverted state, we *cannot please God*, nor *walk in
the Spirit*, nor *pray in the Spirit*. Rom. viii. 8, 9.
It is only the children of God that receive his Spirit
as a spirit of adoption. Rom. viii. 15. *Because ye are
sons, he hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts;*
and it is *by faith* in Christ Jesus that *we receive this
Spirit*. Gal. iii. 14. And wheresoever he is the Spir-
it of all grace, he will, in some measure, be a Spirit
of prayer too.

Let all Christians therefore that would maintain and
increase in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, live much by the
faith of the Son of God, be frequent in acts of depend-
ence upon Christ Jesus; for the *Spirit is given to him
without measure*, and in all *fulness*; that *from his ful-
ness we may derive* every gift, and every grace. John
iii. 34, and i. 16. As in the natural, so in the spirit-
ual or mystical body, the spirits that give life and ac-
tivity to the heart and tongue, and to all the mem-
bers, are derived from the head. He that lives in hea-
ven as our intercessor and advocate, to present our
addresses and petitions to the throne, will send his

own Spirit down to earth, to assist us in drawing them up; live much upon him therefore as your intercessor, and your vital head.

Direction 2. 'Give all diligence to acquire this gift or holy skill, according to the directions concerning the matter, method, and manner of prayer, which have been laid down before, and be much in the practice of prayer both in secret and with one another, that young habits may grow and be improved by exercise.'—The Spirit of God will come and bless the labors of the mind towards the acquiring of spiritual gifts. Timothy is commanded to *give attendance to reading, to meditation on the things of God, and to give himself wholly up to the work, that his profiting may appear unto all*, though he received gifts of inspiration, 1 Tim. iv. 13, compared with verse 14, 15, and 2 Tim. i. 6. And much more should we do it who are not thus inspired.

Though prophecy was a gift of immediate inspiration, yet there were of old the schools of the prophets, or the college, in which young men were trained up in the study of divine things, that they might be the better prepared to receive the spirit of prophecy, and use and improve it better. And these were called the *sons of the prophets*. 2 Kings vi. 1. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 22. *St. Paul labored and strove with his natural powers while the Spirit wrought mightily in him.* Col. i. 29.

Do not imagine yourselves to be in danger of quenching the Spirit, by endeavoring to furnish yourselves with matter or expression of prayer, for the Spirit of God usually works in and by the use of means. As in the things of nature, so in the things of grace, it is a true and divine proverb; *The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath not, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.* Prov. xiii. 4. We are to put forth our best efforts, and then hope for divine assistance; for *the Spirit of God helps together with us,* ‘SUNANTILAMBANETAI.’ Rom. viii. 26. As if a man should take hold of one end of a burden in order to raise it, and some mighty helper should make his labor effectual, by raising it up at the other end, and fulfilling the design. It was the encouragement which David gave his son Solomon, 1 Chron. xxii. 16. *Arise and be doing, and the Lord shall be with thee.* While we are stirring up ourselves to obey the command of God, and seek his face, we have reason to hope his Spirit will strengthen us to this obedience, and assist us in seeking. As when God commanded Ezekiel to arise and *stand upon his feet*, and bad him put forth his natural powers towards raising himself, *the Spirit entered into him, and set him upon his feet*, and by a divine power made him stand. Ezek. ii. 1, 2.

Direction 3. ‘Pray earnestly, and pray for the promised Spirit as a Spirit of prayer.’ Depend not upon all your natural and acquired abilities, what glorious attainments soever you enjoy. How have some

persons been shamefully disappointed, when they have ventured presumptuously to make their addresses to God by the mere strength of their own wit, and memory, and confidence? What hurry and confusion of thought have they fallen into, and been incapable to proceed in the duty? The *Holy Spirit shall be given to them that ask* aright. Luke xi. 13. Plead the promises of Christ with faith in his name; John xiv. 16. 17. for he has promised, in his own name and in his Father's, to send his Holy Spirit.

Direction 4. 'Quench not the Spirit of prayer by confining yourselves to any set forms whatsoever.' Though the Spirit of God may be present, and assist in the exercise of grace, while we use forms of prayer, yet let us have a care how we stifle or restrain any holy motions or good desires, and heavenly affections, that are stirred up in our hearts when we pray. If we refuse to express them, because we will not vary from the form that is written down before us, we run a great risque of grieving the Holy Spirit, and causing him to depart from us, as he is the Spirit of grace, and we effectually hinder ourselves from his assistance in the gift of prayer.

While you borrow the best aids in your devotion from those prayers that are invited by the Spirit of God in scripture, take care and quench not his farther operations by confining yourselves entirely to those words and expressions. The Holy Spirit may be quenched even by tying yourselves to his own

words; for, if he had thought those words of scripture all-sufficient for all the designs and wants of his saints in prayer, he would have given some hint of it in his word; he would have required us to use those prayers always; and there would have been no farther promise of the Spirit to assist us in this work; but now he has promised it, and has forbid us to quench it while we *pray without ceasing*. 1 Thess. v. 17. 18, 19.

Direction 5. ‘Dare not to indulge yourselves in a course of spiritless worship, in a round of formality and lip-service, without pious dispositions and warm devotion in your own spirits.’ There may be danger of this formality and coldness even in the exercise of the gift of prayer, when we are not tied to a form. And how can we think the Spirit of God will come to our assistance, if our spirits withdraw and are absent from the work?

Take notice of the frame of your minds in prayer; observe the presence or absence of this divine assistant, the Holy Spirit; and since ye are bid to *pray always in the Spirit*, Ephes. vi. 18. be not satisfied with any one prayer, where ye have found nothing at all of inward divine breathings towards God through the work of his own Spirit. O the dismal character and temper of those souls that pass whole years of worship, and multiply duties and forms of devotion, without end and without number, and no Spirit in them!

Direction 6. 'Be thankful for every aid of the Spirit of God in prayer, and improve it well.' Spread all the sails of your soul to improve every gale of the heavenly wind, that blows when and where it listeth. John iii. 8. Comply with his holy breathings and spiritual motions. Abide in prayer, when you feel your graces raised into a lively exercise; for it is the Spirit that quickeneth. John vi. 63. He doth not always come in a sensible manner, therefore be tenderly careful lest you shake him off, or thrust him from the door of your hearts, especially if he be a rare visitor.

Direction 7. 'Have a care of pride and self-sufficiency, when, at any time, you feel great enlargements of soul in prayer, and warm affections, and divine delight.' Attribute not to yourselves what is due to God, lest he be provoked. The gift of prayer in a lively and flowing exercise, will be in danger of puffing up the unwary Christian; but let us remember, that it is *with the humble that God will dwell*. Isa. lvii. 15. and to the humble he giveth more grace. James iv. 6.

Direction 8. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit in the course of your conversation in the world.' Walk according to the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, nor make him depart grieved. Ephes. iv. 29. Harken to the whispers of the Spirit of God when he convinces of sin, and comply with his secret dictates when he leads to duty, especially the duty of

prayer at fit times and seasons. Grieve him not by your unwatchfulness, or by wilful sins; resist him not, lest he remove, but rather seek greater degrees of his enlightening and sanctifying influences. If you thrust him utterly away from you in the world, he will not take it well at your hands, nor vouchsafe you his presence in the closet, or in the church. If you grieve him before men, he will withdraw from you when you would come near to God, and leave your souls in grief and bitterness. Deal kindly with him therefore, when he comes to make a visit of conviction to your consciences, and to direct and incline you even to difficult and self-denying duties. Value his presence as a Spirit of knowledge and sanctification, and he will not forsake you as a Spirit of prayer. Live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and then you shall also pray in the Spirit.

Thus I have given short and plain directions how the assistances of the Holy Spirit may be obtained according to the encouragements of the word of God, and the experience of praying Christians; for though he be a sovereign and free agent, and his communications are of pure mercy, so that we can pretend no merit, yet the Spirit of God has so far condescended, as to give promises of his own presence to those that seek it in the way prescribed.

I would not finish this section without a word of advice to those from whom the Spirit of prayer is in

a great measure withdrawn, in order to their recovering his wonted assistance.

Advice 1. ‘Be deeply sensible of the greatness of your loss, mourn over his absence, and lament after the Lord.’ Recollect the times when you could pour out your whole heart before God in prayer, with a rich plenty of expressions and lively graces; compare those shining hours with the dull and dark seasons of retirement which you now complain of. Go and mourn before your God, and say, “How vigorous were all the powers of my nature heretofore in worship! How warm my love! How fervent my zeal! How overflowing was my repentance! And how joyful my thanksgivings and praises! But now what a coldness hath seized my spirit! How dry and dead is my heart, and how far off from God and heaven, even while my knees are bowed before him in secret? How long, O Lord, how long ere thou return again!” Have a care of being satisfied with a circle and course of duties, without the life, power, and pleasure of religion. The Spirit of God will come and revisit the mourners. Jer. xxxi. 20. When God heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, he turned his face toward him with compassion.

Advice 2. ‘Look back and remark the steps whereby the Spirit of God withdrew himself, and search after the sins that provoked him to depart.’ He is not wont to go away and leave his saints, except they grieve him.

See if you cannot find some sensual iniquity indulged. He hates this, for he is a Spirit of purity. David might well fear, after his scandalous sin, that God would *take away his Holy Spirit from him*. Psalm li. 11.

Recollect, if you have not rushed upon some presumptuous sin, and run counter to your own light and knowledge: This is a sure way to make him withdraw his favorable presence.

Ask your conscience, whether you have not resisted this blessed Spirit, when he hath brought a word of conviction, or command, or reproof to your soul? Whether you have not refused to obey some holy influence, and been heedless of his kind motions in any duty or worship? This highly deserves his resentment and departure.

Reflect whether you have not absented yourself sinfully from your closet often, or often left it almost as soon as you came to it, from a prevailing carnality of mind, and sinful weariness of duty, and often shuffled off the work like a tiresome task, because you fancied the world called you: It is no wonder then if the Spirit of prayer absent himself from your closet, even when the world gives you leave to go thither. And you may expect also, that if you decline secret prayer, the Spirit will not always attend you in public.

Consider whether you have not grown proud and vain in gifts and attainments; and thus the Holy

Spirit hath been provoked to leave you to yourself to shew you your own weakness and insufficiency and to abase your pride.

Cry earnestly to him, and beg that he would discover his own enemy, which hath given him so just offence; and when you have found it out, bring it and slay it before the Lord. Confess the sin before him with deep humiliation and self-abasement; abhor, renounce, and abandon it for ever. Bring it to the cross of Christ for pardon, and there let it be crucified and put to death. Cry daily for strength against it from heaven, renew your engagements to be the Lord's, and to walk more watchfully before him.

Advice 3. 'Remember how you obtained the Spirit of prayer at first. Read over all the foregoing directions, and put them all afresh in practice.' Was it by faith in Christ Jesus that the Spirit was first received? Then by renewing acts of faith in Christ seek his return; it is he who first gives, and he who restores this glorious gift.

Was it in the way of labor, duty, and diligence that you found the Spirit's first assistance? Then stir up all the powers of your soul to the same diligence in duty, and strive and labor to get near the throne of God, with the utmost exercise of your natural abilities, depending on his secret influences, and hoping for his return. If the wind blow not, tug harder at the oar, and so make your way toward heaven.—

Dare not indulge a neglect of prayer, upon pretence that the Spirit is departed, for you cannot expect he should revisit you without stirring up your soul to seek him.

Was he given you more sensibly as an answer to prayer at first? Then plead earnestly with God to restore him. If he furnish you not with matter of prayer by his special and present influences, *take with you words* from his own holy book, *and say to him, 'Take away all iniquity, and return and receive me graciously.* Hos. xiv. 1—4. Plead with him his own promises made to returning backsliders, Jer. iii. 22. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 31, 37. and put him in mind of the repenting prodigal in the embraces of his father.

When you have *found him, hold him fast, and never let him go.* Sol. Song iii. 4. Dare not again indulge those follies that provoked his anger and absence. Entertain his first appearances with great thankfulness and holy joy: Let him abide with you, and maintain all his sovereignty within you, and see that you abide in him in all subjection. Walk humbly, and *sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you;* lest he depart again from you, and fill your spirit with fear and bondage, and make you to possess the bitter fruit of your folly; lest he give you up to months and years of darkness, and that measure of the gift of prayer you had attained should be so strangely imprisoned and bound up, that you may be hardly able to pray at all.

C H A P. V.

A PERSUASIVE to learn to PRAY.

IT is to little purpose that the *nature of prayer* is explained, that so many RULES are framed, and DIRECTIONS given to teach persons this *divine skill of prayer*, if they are not persuaded of the necessity and usefulness of it. I would therefore finish these INSTITUTIONS, by leaving some *persuasive arguments* on the mind of the readers, that this attainment is worth their seeking.

I am not going to address myself to those persons, who, through a neglect of serious religion, have risen to the insolence of scoffing at all prayers, besides public divine services and authorised forms: Nor am I now seeking to persuade those who may have some taste of serious piety, but by a superstitious and obstinate veneration of liturgies, have forever abandoned all thoughts of learning to pray.

I think there is enough in the *second* chapter of this treatise to convince impartial men, that the GIFT of PRAYER is no enthusiastical pretence, no insignificant cant of a particular party; but an useful and necessary qualification for all men; a piece of Christian skill to be attained in a rational way, by the use of proper means and the blessing of the Holy Spirit. If what I have said cannot have influence on these persons, I

leave them to the farther instruction and reproof of a great and venerable man, whose name I have mentioned before, a learned prelate of the established church, who speaks thus :

‘ For any one to satisfy himself with a form of
‘ prayer, is still to remain in infancy : It is the duty
‘ of every Christian to grow and increase in all the
‘ duties of Christianity, *gifts* as well as *graces*. Now
‘ how can a man be said to live suitably to these rules,
‘ who doth not put forth himself in some attempts
‘ and endeavors of this kind ? And if it be a fault
‘ not to strive and labor after this gift, much more is
‘ it to jeer and despise it by the name of *extempore*
‘ *prayer*, and *praying by the Spirit* ; which expres-
‘ sions, as they are frequently used by some men by
‘ way of reproach, are for the most part a sign of a
‘ profane heart, and such as are altogether strangers
‘ from the power and comfort of this duty.’

My business here is to apply myself to those who have some sense of their obligation to prayer, and of the impossibility of answering all their necessities by any set forms whatsoever, but through a coldness and indifferency in things of religion, take no pains to acquire the gift, or content themselves with so slight and imperfect a degree of it, that themselves or others are not much the better. It is this sort of Christians that I would stir up and awaken to diligence, in seeking so valuable an attainment.

But here I would have it again observed, that the qualifications I recommend do not consist in a treasure of sublime notions, florid phrases, and gay eloquence; but merely in a competent supply of religious thoughts, which are the fit materials of prayer, and a readiness to express them in plain and proper words, with a free and natural decency.

1. The *first* argument or persuasive I shall draw from the *design and dignity* of this gift.

There is such a thing as correspondence with heaven, and prayer is a great part of it while we dwell on earth. Who would not be ambitious to correspond with heaven? Who would not be willing to learn to pray? This is the language wherein God hath appointed the sons of Adam, who are but worms and dust, to address the King of glory, their Maker; and shall there be any among the sons of Adam that will not learn this language? Shall worms and dust refuse this honor and privilege? This is the speech which the sons of God use in talking with their heavenly Father; and shall not all the children know how to speak it? This is the manner and behavior of a saint, and these the expressions of his lips, while his soul is breathing in a divine air, and stands before God. Why should not every man be acquainted with this manner of address, that he may join in practice with all the saints, and have access at all times to the greatest and best of beings?

There are indeed some sincere Christians who daily worship God, and yet they are often laboring for want of matter, and are perpetually at a loss for proper expressions: They have but a mean attainment of this holy skill; but it is neither their honor nor their interest to perform so divine a work with so many human weaknesses, and yet be satisfied with them. There are children that can but just cry after their father, and stammer out a broken word or two, by which he can understand their meaning; but these are infants, and ungrown. The father had rather see his children advancing to manhood, and entertaining themselves daily with that large and free converse with himself, which he allows, and to which he graciously invites them.

Praying is a sacred and appointed means to obtain all the blessings that we want, whether they relate to this life or to the life to come; and shall we not know how to use the means God hath appointed for our own happiness? Shall so glorious a privilege lie unimproved through our own neglect?

Were the business of prayer nothing else but to come and beg mercy of God, it would be the duty of every man to know how to draw up such petitions, and present them in such a way as becomes a mortal petitioner: But prayer is a work of much larger extent. When a holy soul comes before God, he hath much more to say than merely to beg. He tells his God what a sense he has of the divine attributes, and

what high esteem he pays to his majesty, his wisdom, his power, and his mercy. He talks with him about the works of the creation, and stands wrapt up in wonder. He talks about the grace and mystery of redemption, and is yet more filled with admiration and joy. He talks of all the affairs of nature, grace, and glory. He speaks of his works of providence, of love and vengeance, in this and the future world. Infinite and glorious are the subjects of this holy communion between God and his saints: And shall we content ourselves with sighs and groans, and a few short wishes, and deprive our souls of so rich, so divine, so various a pleasure, for want of knowing how to furnish out such meditations, and to speak this blessed language?

How excellent and valuable is this *skill of praying*, in comparison of the many meaner arts and accomplishments of human nature, that we labor night and day to obtain? What toil do men daily undergo for seven years together, to acquire the knowledge of a *trade and business* in this present life? Now the greatest part of the business between us and heaven, is transacted in the way of prayer: With how much more diligence should we seek the knowledge of this heavenly commerce, than any thing that concerns us merely on earth? How many years of our short life are spent to learn the *Greek*, the *Latin*, and the *French tongues*, that we may hold correspondence abroad among the living nations, or converse with the writings of the dead? And shall not the language where-

in we converse with heaven, and the living God, be thought worth equal pains? How nicely do some persons study the *art of conversation*, that they may be accepted in all companies, and share in the favor of men? Is not the same care due to seek all methods of acceptance with God, that we may approve ourselves in his presence? What a high value is set upon *human oratory*, or the *art of persuasion*, whereby we are fitted to discourse and prevail with our fellow-creatures? And is this art of divine oratory of no esteem with us, which teaches us to utter our inward breathings of the soul, and plead and prevail with our Creator through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and mediation of our Lord Jesus?

O let the excellency and high value of this gift of prayer engage our earnestness and endeavors in proportion to its superior dignity: Let us *covet the best of gifts* with the warmest desire, and pray for them with ardent supplication, 1 Cor. xii. 31.

II. Another argument may be borrowed from our very *character* and *profession* as *Christians*; some measure of the gift of prayer is of great necessity and universal use to all that are called by the name.

Shall we profess to be followers of Christ, and not know how to speak to the Father? Are we commanded to pray always, and upon all occasions, to be constant and fervent in it, and shall we be contented with ignorance and incapacity to obey this command? Are

we invited by the warmest exhortations, and encouraged by the highest hopes, to draw near to God with all our wants and sorrows, and shall we not learn to express those wants, and pour out those sorrows before the Lord? Is there a way made for our access to the throne by the blood and intercession of Jesus Christ, and shall we not know how to form a prayer to be sent to heaven, and spread before the throne by his glorious intercession? Is his Holy Spirit promised to teach us to pray, and shall a Christian be careless or unwilling to receive such divine teachings?

There is not any faculty in the whole Christian life that is called out into so frequent exercise as this; and it is a most unhappy thing to be always at a loss to perform the work which daily necessity requires, and daily duty demands. Will a person profess to be a *scholar* that cannot read? Shall a man pretend to be a *minister* that cannot preach? And it is but a poor pretence we make to Christianity, if we are not able, at least in secret, to supply ourselves with a few meditations or expressions, to continue a little in this work of prayer.

Remember then, O Christian, this is not a gift that belongs to ministers alone, nor alone to governors of families, who are under constant obligation to pray in public; though it most highly concerns them to be expert in this holy skill, that with courage and presence of mind, with honor and decency, they may discharge this part of their duty to God in their con-

gregations and households. But this duty hath a farther extent. Every man that is joined to a church of Christ should seek after an ability to help the church with his prayers; or at least upon more private occasions, to join with a few fellow-Christians in seeking to God their Father. Nor are women, though they are forbidden to speak in the church, forbid to pray in their own families, nor with one another in a private chamber; and I am persuaded, Christians would ask one another's assistance more frequently in prayer, upon special occasions, if a good gift of prayer were more commonly sought, and more universally obtained. Nor would congregations in the country be dismissed, and the whole Lord's day pass without public worship, where a minister is suddenly taken sick, if some grave and discreet christian of good ability in prayer, would but take that part of worship upon him, together with the reading some well composed sermon, and some useful portion of holy scripture. Doubtless this would be most acceptable to that God who *loves the gates of Zion*, or his own public ordinances, *more than all the dwellings of Jacob*, or worship of private families, Psalm lxxxvii. 2.

Thus far is this gift necessary wheresoever social prayer may be performed. But the necessity of it reaches farther still. There is not a man, woman, or child, that is capable of seeking God, but is bound to exercise something of the gift of prayer. And those that never have any call from providence, to be the

mouth of others in speaking to God, are called daily to speak to God themselves. It is necessary therefore, that every soul should be so far furnished with a *knowledge of the perfections of God*, as to be able to adore them distinctly; should have such an *acquaintance with its own wants*, as to express them particularly before God, at least in the conceptions and language of the mind; should have such an *apprehension of the encouragements to pray*, as to be able to plead with God for supply; and should have such an *observation and remembrance of divine mercies*, as to repeat some of them before God with humble thanksgivings.

III. I would pursue this persuasive by a *third* argument drawn from the *divine delight*, and exceeding great *advantage* of this gift to our own souls, and to the souls of all that join in prayer with us.

Christians, have ye never felt your spirits raised from a carnal and vain temper of mind, to a devout frame, by a lively prayer? Have ye not found your whole soul overspread with holy affections, and carried up to heaven with most abundant pleasure, by the pious and regular performance of him that speaks to God in worship? And when ye have been cold and indifferent to divine things, have ye not felt that heavy and listless humor expelled, by joining with the warm and lively expressions of a person skilful in this duty? How sweet a refreshment have ye found under inward burdens of mind, or outward afflictions,

when in broken language you have told them to your minister, and he hath spread them before God, and that in such words as have spoke your whole souls and your sorrows? And you have experienced a sweet serenity and calm of spirits; you have risen up from your knees with your countenance no more sad: And have ye not wished for the same gift yourselves, that ye might be able upon all occasions thus to address the throne of grace, and pour out all your hearts in this manner before your God? But what a sad inconvenience is it to live in such a world as this, where we are liable daily to so many new troubles and temptations, and not be able to express them to God in prayer; unless we find them written in the words of a form? and how hard is it to find any form suited to all our new wants and new sorrows?

At other times what divine impressions of holiness have ye felt in public worship in the congregation, where this duty hath been performed with holy skill and fervency? And in that prayer you have received more solid edification than from the whole sermon. How dead have you been to all sinful temptations, and how much devoted to God? And do ye not long to be able to pray thus in your households and in your own closet? Would it not be a pleasure for men to be thus able to entertain their whole families daily? And for Christians thus to entertain one another, when they meet to pray to their common God and Father? and to help one another, at this rate, onward to the world of praise? When the disciples had just

been witnesses to the devotion of our Lord, Luke xi. 1. who *spake as never man spake*, their hearts grew warm under the words of that blessed worshipper, and one of them, in the name of the rest, cried out, *Lord teach us to pray too*.

Thus a good attainment of this gift is made a happy instrument of sanctification as well as comfort, by the co-working power of the blessed Spirit.

But on the other hand, hath not your painful experience sometimes taught you, that zeal and devotion hath been cooled, and almost quenched by the vain repetitions or weak and wandering thoughts of some fellow-Christian that leads the worship? and at another time a well-framed prayer of beautiful order and language hath been rendered disagreeable by some unhappy tones and gestures, so that you have been ready to long for the conclusion, and have been weary of attendance.

Who then would willingly remain ignorant of such an attainment, which is so sweet and successful an instrument to advance religion in the powers and pleasures of it in their own hearts, and the hearts of all men that are round about them?

IV. The honor of God and the credit of religion in the world, will afford me another set of arguments, to excite you to attain this skill of prayer.

The great God esteems himself dishonored, when

we do not pay him the *best worship* we are capable of. The work of the Lord must not be done negligently. It is highly for his honor, that we be furnished with the *best talents* for his service, and that we employ them in the *best manner*. This discovers to the world the inward high esteem and veneration we have for our Maker: This gives him glory in the eyes of men. But to neglect utterly this gift of prayer, and to serve him daily with a few sudden thoughts, with rude and improper expressions, that never cost us any thing but the labor of our lips while we speak, this is not the way to sanctify his name among men.

There is a sinful *steth* and *indifference* in religion, that hath tempted some men to believe that God is no curious and exact enquirer into outward things: And if they can but persuade themselves their intentions are right, they imagine that for the substance and form of their sacrifice any thing will serve: And as though he were not a God of order, they address him often in confusion. Because the *heart* is the chief thing in divine worship, like some foolish Israelites, they are regardless what beast they offer him, so it hath but a heart. But the prophet Malachi thunders with divine indignation and jealousy against such worshippers. *Ye have brought that which was torn and lame, and the sick; should I accept this at your hand? I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful*, Mal. i. 13, 14. He upbraids us with sharp resentment, and bids us *offer it to our governor*, and asks if he will be pleased with

it? Now our consciences sufficiently inform us, how careful we are when we make an address to an earthly governor, to have our thoughts well ordered, and words well chosen, as well as to tender it with a loyal heart: And may not our supreme governor in heaven expect a due care in ordering our thoughts, and choosing our words, so far at least as to answer all the designs of prayer, and so far as is consistent with the necessity of frequent addresses to him, and our other Christian duties?

The credit of religion in the world, is much concerned in the honorable discharge of the duty of prayer.

There is an inward beauty in divine worship that consists in the devout temper of the worshippers, and the lively exercise of holy affections; but of this God only is witness, who sees the heart. There is also an outward beauty that arises from a decent and acceptable performance of all the parts of it that come within the notice of our fellow-creatures; that those that observe us may be forced to acknowledge the excellence of religion in our practice of it.

Where worship is performed by immediate inspiration, a natural order of things, and a becoming behavior, is required in him especially who leads the worship. This is the design of the apostle in his advice to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. xiv. 40. *Let all things be done decently and in order*; this is, let such

a prudent conduct, such a regular and rational management in all the parts of worship be found among you, as gives a natural beauty to human actions, and will give a visible glory to the acts of religion. Where this advice is followed, *if the unlearned and unbeliever, that is, ignorant and profane, come into the assembly, they will fall down and worship God, and report God is in you of a truth*, ver. 25. But if ye are guilty of disorder in speaking, and break the rules of natural light and reason in uttering your inspirations, *the unlearned and unbelievers will say, ye are mad*, though your words may be the dictates of the Holy Spirit.

Much more is this applicable to our common and ordinary performance of worship. When any skillful person speaks in prayer with a heaviness and penury of thought, with a mean and improper language, with a false and offensive tone of voice, or accompanies his words with awkward motions, what slanders are thrown upon our practice? A whole party of Christians is ridiculed, and the scoffer saith, *we are mad*. But when a minister or master of a family, with a fluency of devout sentiments and language, offers his petitions and praises to God in the name of all that are present, and observes all the rules of natural decency in his voice and gesture; how much credit is done to our profession hereby, even in the opinion of those who have no kindness for our way of worship? And how effectually doth such a performance confute the pretended necessity of imposing

forms? How gloriously doth it triumph over the
slanders of the adversary, and force a conviction up-
on the mind, that there is something divine and hea-
venly among us?

I cannot represent this in a better manner than is
done by an ingenious author of the last age, who being
a courtier in the reigns of the two brothers, CHARLES
and JAMES the second, can never lie under the sus-
picion of being a dissenter; and that is the late Mar-
quis of Halifax. This noble writer, in a little book
under a borrowed character, gives his own sentiments
of things. He tells us, that ‘He is far from relish-
‘ing the impertinent wanderings of those who pour
‘out long prayers upon the congregation, and all from
‘their own stock; a barren soil, which produces weeds
‘instead of flowers; and by this means they expose
‘religion itself, rather than promote men’s devotions.
‘On the other side, there may be too great straint put
‘upon men whom God and nature hath distinguish-
‘ed from their fellow-laborers, by blessing them with
‘a happier talent, and by giving them not only good
‘sense, but a powerful utterance too, has enabled
‘them to gush out upon the attentive auditory, with
‘a mighty stream of devout and unaffected eloquence.
‘When a man so qualified, endued with learning too,
‘and above all, adorned with a good life, breaks out
‘into a warm and well-delivered prayer before his
‘sermon, it has the appearance of a divine rapture;
‘he raises and leads the hearts of his assembly in ano-
‘ther manner than the most composed or best stu-

‘ died form of set words can ever do: And the *pray*
‘ *we’s*, who serve up all their sermons with the same
‘ garnishing, would look like so many statues, or
‘ men of straw in the pulpit, compared with those
‘ that speak with such a powerful zeal, that men are
‘ tempted at the moment to believe heaven itself has
‘ dictated their words to them.’

V. A *fifth persuasive* to seek the *gift of prayer*, shall be drawn from the *easiness* of attaining it, with the common assistance of the Holy Spirit. *Easy* I call it, in comparison of the long toil and difficulty that men go through in order to acquire a common knowledge in arts, sciences, or trades in this world; though it is not to be expected without some pains and diligence.

Some young persons may be so foolish and unhappy, as to make two or three bold attempts to pray in company, before they have well learnt to pray in secret, and finding themselves much at a loss and bewildered in their thoughts, or confounded for want of presence of mind, they have abandoned all hopes, and contented themselves with saying, *it is impossible*: And as they have tempted God, by rashly venturing upon such an act of worship without any due care and preparation, so they have afterwards thrown the blame of their own sloth upon God himself, and cried, ‘ It is a mere gift of heaven, but God hath not
‘ bestowed it upon me.’ This is as if a youth who had just begun to read logic, should attempt immediately to dispute in a public school, and finding him-

self baffled and confounded, should cast away his book renounce his studies, and say, ‘ I shall never learn it ‘ it is impossible.’ Whereas when we seek any attainment, we must begin regularly, and go on gradually toward perfection with patience and labor: Let but the rules recommended in the *second chapter* of this treatise, for acquiring the *gift of prayer*, be duly followed, and I doubt not but a Christian of ordinary capacity, may in time gain so much of this skill, as to answer the demands of his duty and his station.

Rather than I would be utterly destitute of this gift of prayer, I would make such an experiment as this. Once a month I would draw up a new prayer for myself in writing, for morning and evening, and for the Lord’s day, according to all parts of this duty described in the first chapter of this book, or out of the scriptures that Mr. HENRY hath culled in his *Method of Prayer* (which book I would recommend to all Christians:) I would use it constantly all that month, yet never confining myself all along to those very same words, but giving myself a liberty to put in or leave out, or enlarge according to the present workings of my heart, or occurrences of providence. Thus by degrees I would write less and less, at last setting down little more than heads or hints of thought and expression; just as ministers learn by degrees to leave off their sermon-notes in preaching. I would try whether a year or two of this practice would not furnish me with an ability, in some measure to pray, without this help; always making it one of my pe-

titions, that God would pour more of his spirit, upon me, and teach me the skill of praying. And by such short abstracts and general heads of prayer, well drawn up for children, according to their years and knowledge, they may be taught to pray by degrees, and begin before they are six years old.

Objection. If any Christian that loves his ease should abuse this proposal, and say, ‘ If I may use this prayer of my own framing for a month together, Why may I not use it all my life, and so give myself no farther trouble about learning to pray?’

Answer 1. I would first desire such a man to read over again the great inconveniencies, mentioned in the second chapter, that arise from a perpetual use of forms, and the danger of confinement to them.

Answer 2. I would say in the second place, The matter of prayer is almost infinite: It extends to every thing we can have to transact with our Maker, and it is impossible, in a few pages, to mention particularly one tenth part of the subjects of our converse with God. But in drawing up new prayers every month, in time we may run through a great part of those subjects, and grow by degrees to be habitually furnished for converse with him on all occasions whatsoever; which can never be done by dwelling always upon one form or two. As children that learn to read at school daily take out new lessons, that they may be

able to read at last every thing; which they would not attain if they always dwelt on the same lesson.

Answer 3. Besides, there is a blessed variety of expressions in scripture, to represent our wants, and sorrows, and dangers; the glory, power, and grace of God, his promises and covenant, our hopes and discouragements; and sometimes one expression, sometimes another, may best suit our present turn of thought and temper of our minds. It is good therefore to have as large a furniture of this kind as possible, that we might never be at a loss to express the inward sentiments of our souls, and clothe our desires and wishes in such words as are most exactly fitted to them.

Answer 4. Though God is not the more affected with variety of words and arguments in prayer, (for he acts upon other principles borrowed from himself) yet our natures are more affected with such a variety; our graces are drawn into more vigorous exercise, and by our importunity in pleading with God, with many arguments, we put ourselves more directly under the promise that is made to importunate petitioners; and we become fitter to receive the mercies we seek.

Yet, in the last place I would answer by way of concession: If we have the scheme and substance of several prayers ready composed, and well suited to all the most useful cases and concerns of life and religion, and if one or other of these be daily used with seriousness, interposing new expressions wherever the

soul is drawn out to farther breathings after God, or where it finds occasion for new matter from some present providences: This is much rather to be approved than a neglect of all prayer, or a dwelling upon a single form or two; and it will be more edifying to those who join with us, than a perpetual confusion of thought, and endless dishonorable attempts in the mere extemporary way.

But I speak this by way of indulgence to persons of weaker gifts, or when the natural spirits are low, or the mind much indisposed for duty: And in these cases the way of addressing God, which is called *mixed prayer*, will be so far from confining the pious soul to a dead form of worship, that it will sometimes prove a sweet enlargement and release to the spirit under its own darkness and confinement. It will furnish it with spiritual matter, and awaken it to a longer and more lively converse with God in its own language; and (if I may use a plain comparison) it will be like pouring a little water into a pump, whereby a much greater quantity will be raised from the spring when it lies low in the earth.

Objection. If any Christian, on the other hand, should forbid all use of such compositions, as supposing them utterly unlawful, and quenching the Spirit.

Answer. I would humbly reply, there is no danger of that, while we do not rest in them, as our designed end, but use them only as means to help us to pray, and never once confine ourselves to them with-

out liberty or alteration. It is the saying of a great divine, " Though set forms, made by others, be as a
" crutch or help of our insufficiency, yet those which
" we compose ourselves, are a fruit of our sufficiency;
" and that a man ought not to be so confined by any
" premeditated form, as to neglect any special infu-
" sion; he should so prepare himself, as if he expect-
" ed no assistance; and he should so depend upon di-
" vine assistance, as if he had made no preparation."

Here, if I might obtain leave of my fathers in the ministry, I would say this to younger students: That if in their private years of study they pursued such a course once a week, as I have here described, I am persuaded their gifts would be richly improved; their ministerial labors would be more universally accepted by the world; their talents would be attractive of multitudes to their place of worship; the hearers would be raised in their spirits while the preacher prays with a regular and divine eloquence; and they would receive those sermons with double influence and success, which are attended with such prayers.

VI. The last attempt I shall make to convince Christians of the necessity of seeking this gift, shall be merely by representing the ill consequences of the neglect of it. If you take no pains to learn to pray, you will unavoidably fall into one of these three evils.

Either first you will drag on heavily in the work of prayer all your days, even in your closets as well as your family, and be liable to so many imperfec-

tions in the performance, as will rob your own soul of a great part of the benefit and the delight of this sweet duty, and give neither pleasure nor profit to them that hear you. The ignorant part of your household will sleep under you, while the more knowing are in pain for you: and perhaps you will sometimes think to make amends for the dulness of the devotion, by increasing the length of it: But this is to add one error to another, and lay more burdens upon them that are weary.

Or secondly, if you find that you cannot carry on the constancy of this duty with tolerable satisfaction, you will give yourself up to a morning and evening form, and rest in them from year to year. Now tho' it may be possible for some persons to use a form without deadness and formality of spirit, yet such as from a mere principle of sloth neglect to learn to pray, are most likely to fall into formality and slothfulness in the use of forms, and the power of religion will be lost.

Or, in the last place, if you have been bred up with an universal hatred of all forms of prayer, and yet know not how to pray without them, you will grow first inconstant in the discharge of this duty; every little hindrance will put you by; and at last, perhaps, you will leave it off entirely, and your house and your closet too, in time, will be without prayer.

Christians, which of these three evils will ye choose? Can ye be satisfied to drudge on to your life's end a-

mong improprieties and indecencies, and thus expose prayer to contempt? Or will your minds be easy to be confined for ever to a form or two of slothful devotion? Or shall prayer be banished out of your houses, and all appearance of religion be lost among you?

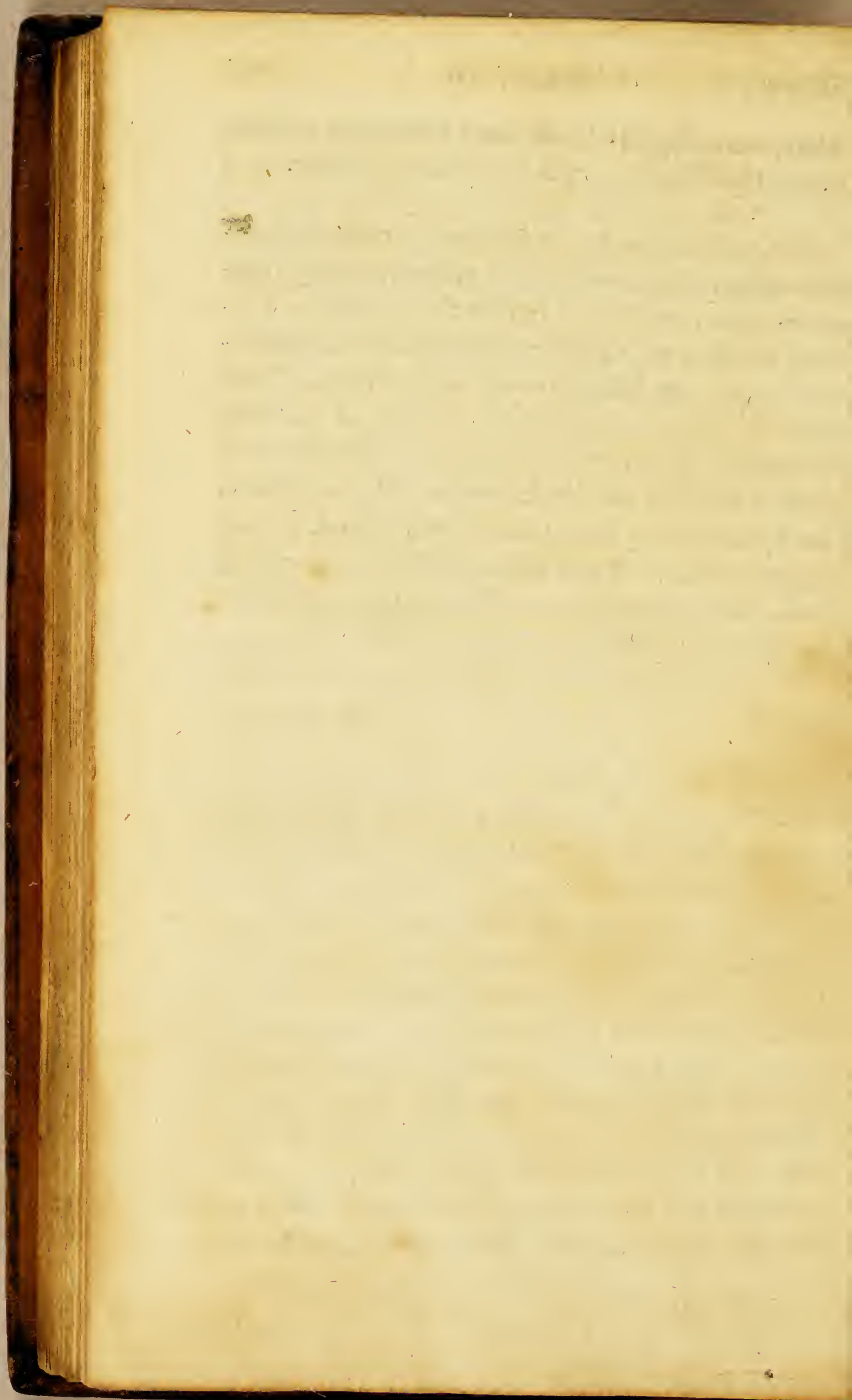
Parents, which of these evils do you choose for your children? You charge them to pray daily; you tell them the sin and danger of dwelling all upon prayer-books, and yet you scarce ever give them any regular instructions how to perform this duty. How can you expect they should maintain religion honorably in their families, and avoid the things you forbid? But whatsoever ill consequences attend them hereafter, consider what share of the guilt will lie at the door of those who never took any pains to shew them to pray.

While I am persuading Christians with so much earnestness to seek the gift of prayer, surely none will be so weak as to imagine the grace and Spirit of prayer may be neglected. Without some degrees of common influence from the blessed Spirit, the gift is not to be attained. And without the exercise of grace in this duty, the prayer will never reach heaven, nor prevail with God. He is not taken with the brightest forms of worship, if the heart be not there. Be the thoughts never so divine, the expressions never so sprightly, and delivered with all the sweet and moving accents of speech, it is all in his esteem but a fair carcass without a soul: It is a mere picture of prayer; a dead picture, which cannot charm; a lifeless orphan,

which the living God will never accept, nor will our great High-Priest ever present it to the Father.

But these things do not fall directly under my present design. I would therefore recommend my readers to those treatises that enforce the necessity of spiritual worship, and describe the glory of inward devotion above the best outward performances. Then shall they learn the perfection of beauty in this part of worship, when the gift and grace of prayer are happily joined in the secret pleasure and success of it, and appear before men in its full loveliness and attractive power. Then shall religion look like itself, divine and heavenly, and shine in all the lustre it is capable of here upon earth.

THE END.



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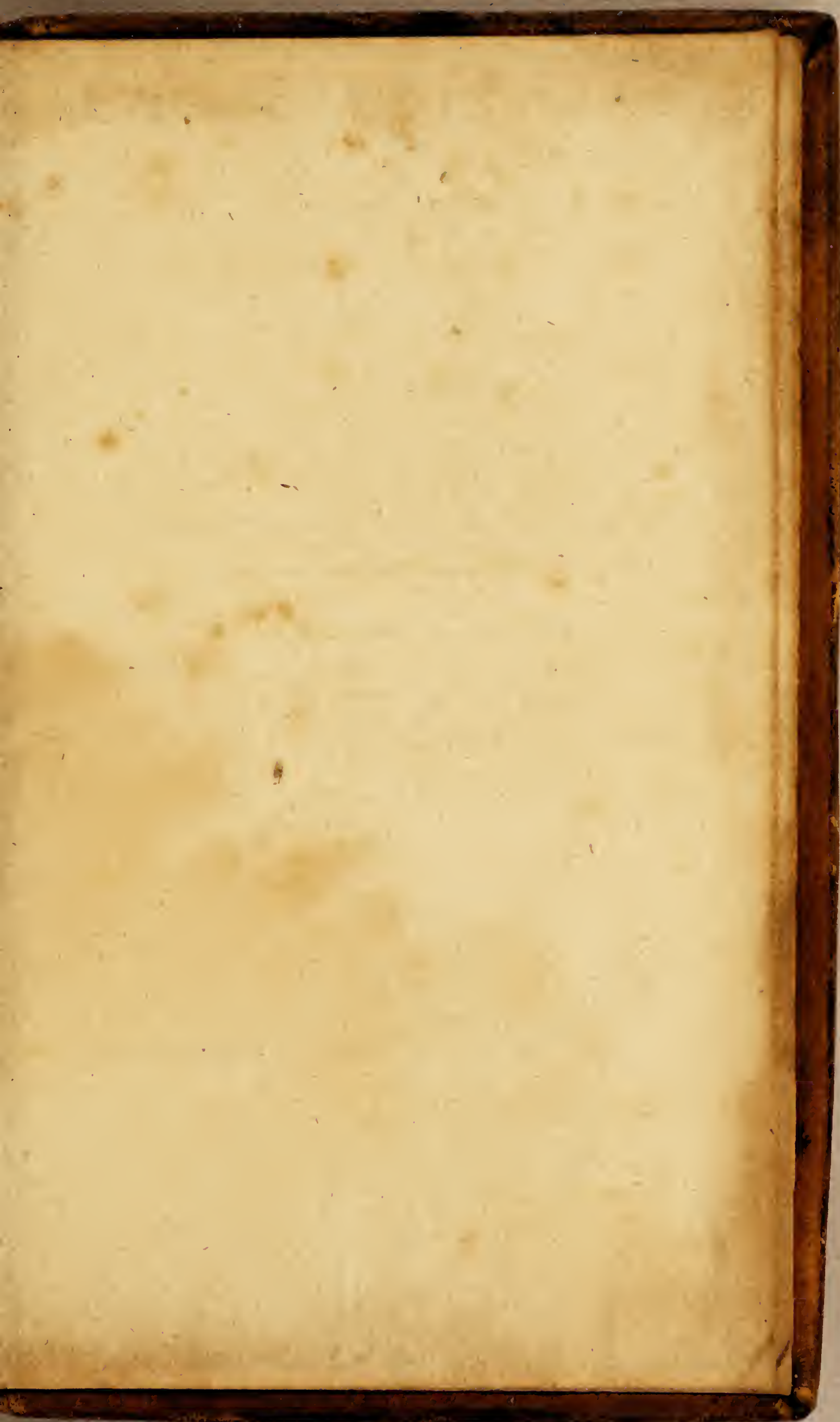
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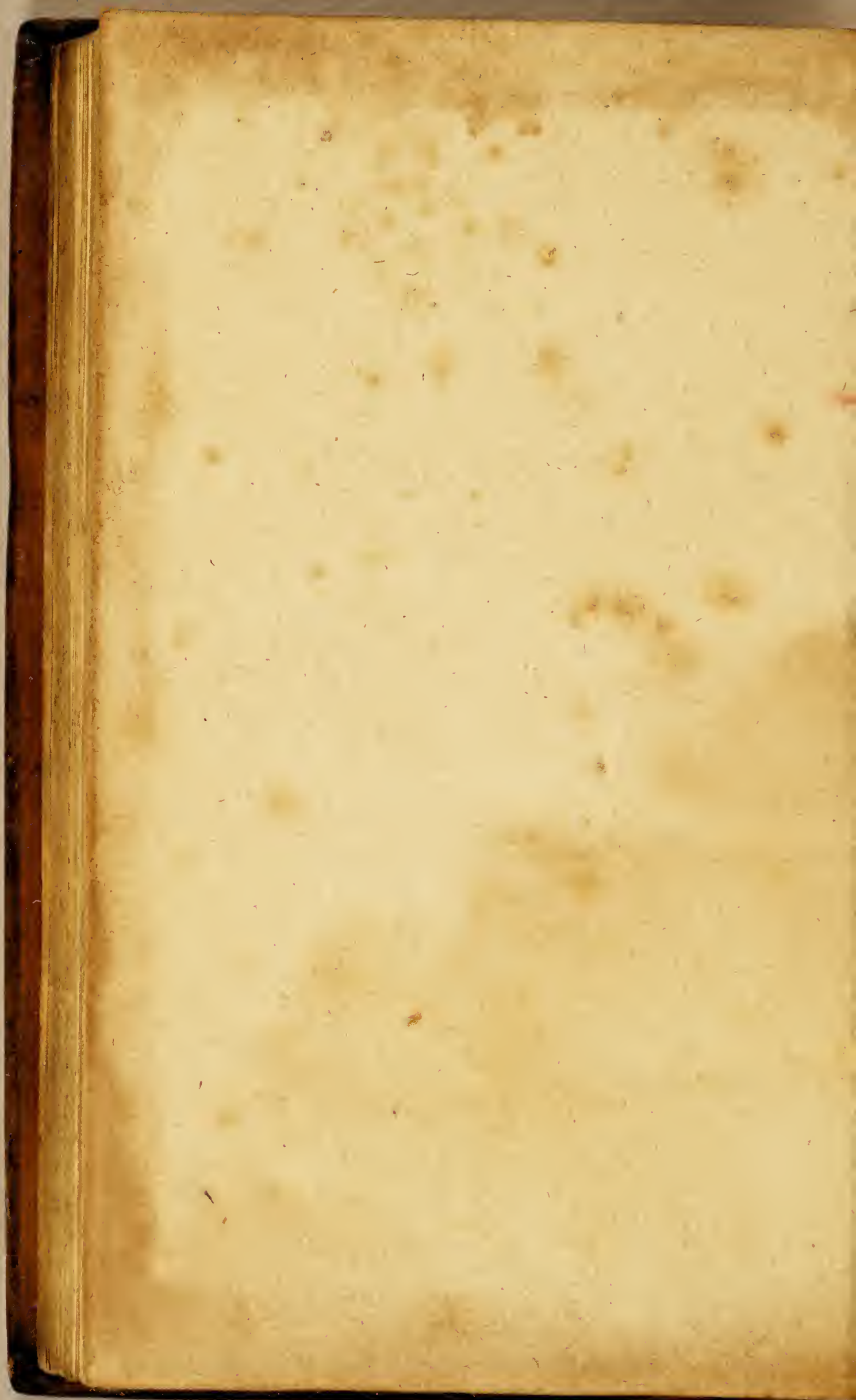
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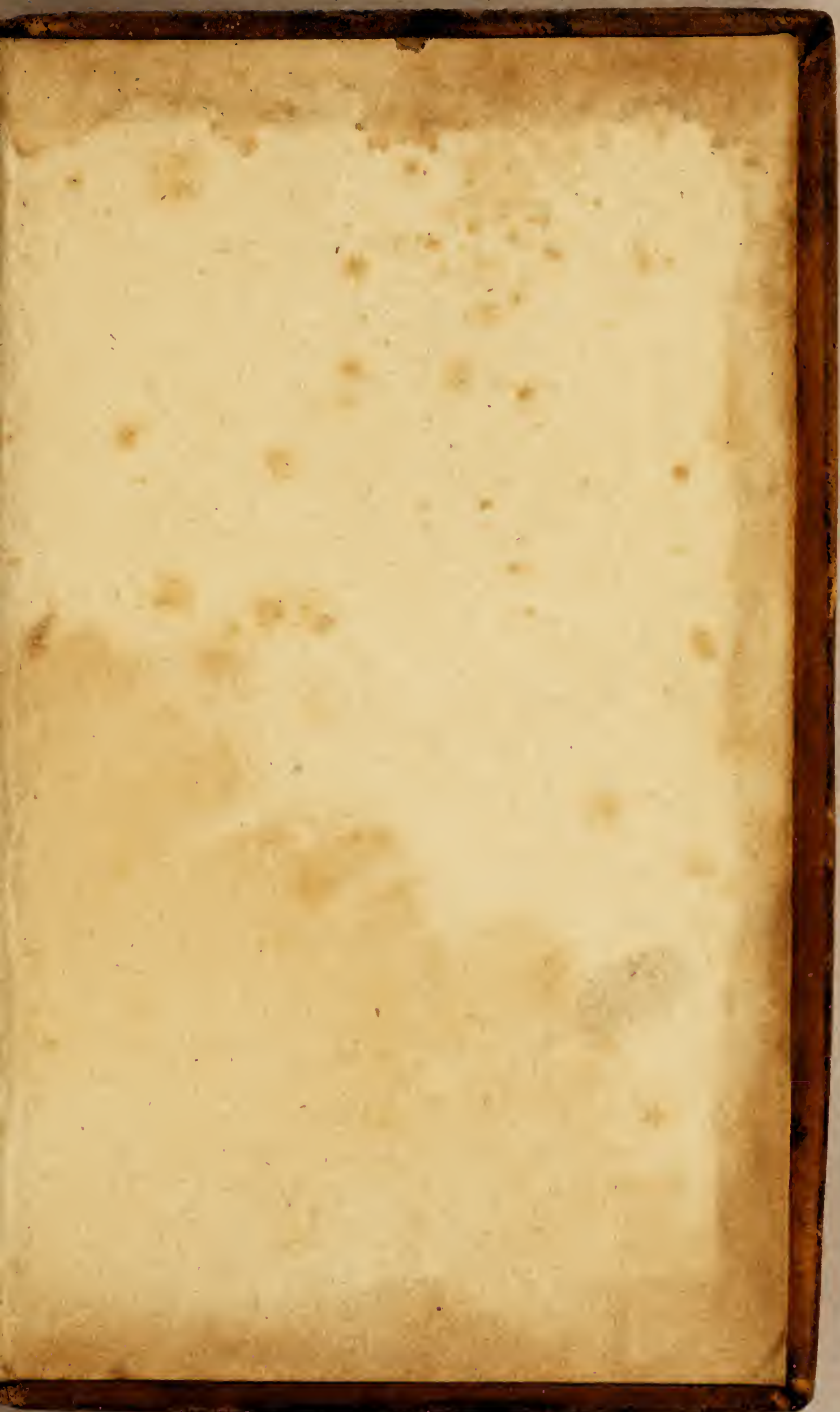
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